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COUGHLIN AND CLEVELAND

A Thesis Submitted to the
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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Karen G. Ketchaver

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The thesis of Karen G. Ketchaver is hereby accepted:

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ABSTRACT

Father Charles E. Coughlin was one of the most prominent, and most controversial, figures in the United States in the 1930s and in the early years of the 1940s. This Canadian-born cleric rose from the life of an ordinary parish priest to becoming one of the leading radio phenomena of his day, masterfully using the new medium to command a vast audience. Coughlin began his radio career addressing religious subjects, but he expanded into the realm of politics by the early 1930s. His views became more and more extreme, and, by the latter part of the decade, he became increasingly anti-Semitic, stridently anti-communist, a fervent isolationist, and an admirer of European fascism. While millions of Americans were enthralled by the man who came to be known as “the Radio Priest,” others viewed him as a dangerous demagogue.

The city of Cleveland, Ohio, figured prominently in Coughlin’s career. His radio broadcasts were highly popular throughout the Cleveland listening area, and the priest made a number of high-profile appearances in the city throughout the 1930s. In particular, two of Coughlin’s speeches in Cleveland in 1936 received wide national attention when the priest’s Union Party aspired to influence that year’s presidential election. However, it was not only politicians who struggled with the appeal of the Radio Priest. The increasingly controversial Coughlin became a thorny problem for the leader of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, Bishop Joseph Schrembs.

This thesis examines the Cleveland connections of Father Charles E. Coughlin. The first part describes Coughlin’s origins, his rise to prominence, and the reaction he garnered. The second part reviews the way three Cleveland newspapers reported on and editorialized about Coughlin. The complex Coughlin-Schrembs relationship as revealed

through diocesan correspondence from 1928 to 1940 is explored in the third part. The thesis concludes with an analysis of the part Cleveland played in Coughlin's career and the impact he had on the city.

INTRODUCTION

The date was July 16, 1936; the place was Cleveland, Ohio. The second national convention of the Townsend Old Age Revolving Pension Society was meeting in the immense Public Auditorium downtown. The final speaker of the day, a Roman Catholic priest from Royal Oak, Michigan, strode to the rostrum. He began speaking slowly and calmly about his organization, the National Union for Social Justice, his voice displaying the lilt of an Irish brogue. Midway through his speech, his demeanor began to change. He became increasingly animated as he vehemently denounced the “money changers” of the Federal Reserve System and strongly criticized the president of the United States, whom the speaker had once enthusiastically supported. Working up a sweat, he removed his black coat and then ripped off his clerical collar; as the spellbound crowd of 10,000 rose to their feet, the speaker lashed out:

As far as the National Union is concerned, no candidate who is endorsed for Congress can campaign, go electioneering for, or support the great betrayer and liar, Franklin D. Roosevelt....I ask you to purge the man who claims to be a democrat from the Democratic Party – I mean Franklin Double-Crossing Roosevelt.¹

The speaker was Father Charles E. Coughlin, a Canadian-born cleric who rose from obscure parish priest to one of the leading radio phenomena of his day, and who commanded a vast audience – at least ten million on an average Sunday. Some radio experts estimated it as the largest radio audience in the world.² *Fortune* magazine called Coughlin “just about the biggest thing that ever happened to radio.”³

The average resident of the Cleveland area today may know little, if anything, about Coughlin. However, Cleveland figured prominently in the career of the man who came to be known as “the Radio Priest.” Coughlin’s earliest broadcasts on the 50,000-

watt Detroit station WJR were easily picked up in northeastern Ohio; later, when Coughlin assembled his own network of stations, his broadcasts were heard on Cleveland station WGAR.⁴ In addition to the speech given on July 16, 1936, Cleveland was the setting for other notable Coughlin appearances. As he did across America, the Radio Priest became a lightning rod for political controversy in the Cleveland area. Many enthralled Clevelanders hung on “Father’s” every word and supported him wholeheartedly; others were appalled by him and viewed him as a dangerous demagogue. When Coughlin’s Union Party presented its own candidate for president in the 1936 election, Democrats worried; Democratic Party National Chairman James Farley perceived Coughlin’s influence as “greater in Ohio than in any other state.” According to historian David H. Bennett, “Almost daily, Democratic headquarters received reports like the following: ‘The greatest menace that threatens the party [in Cleveland] is Coughlin.’”⁵ However, it was not only politicians who grappled with the appeal of the Radio Priest. The increasingly controversial Coughlin became a knotty problem for the leader of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, Bishop Joseph Schrembs.

This thesis examines the Cleveland connections of Father Charles E. Coughlin. The first part describes Coughlin’s origins, his rise to prominence, and the reaction he garnered. The second part reviews how three Cleveland newspapers, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Cleveland Press*, and the *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, reported on and editorialized about Coughlin. The complex Coughlin-Schrembs relationship as revealed through diocesan correspondence from 1928 to 1940 is explored in the third part. The thesis concludes with an analysis of the part Cleveland played in Coughlin’s career and the impact he had on the city.

PART ONE: THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE RADIO PRIEST

Charles Edward Coughlin was born in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, on October 25, 1891, the first child of Thomas and Amelia Coughlin. Thomas Coughlin was an American, born in Ladoga, Indiana. When he was 16 he began stoking coal on Great Lakes steamers, a job he continued for seven years; he then found his way to Hamilton. The historical record of Thomas's various jobs in Hamilton is unclear, but he eventually found employment as a sexton at St. Mary's Cathedral. He met and courted Amelia Mahoney, who was ten years younger; the couple married on November 25, 1890. The Coughlins owned their own house, a modest but comfortable bungalow virtually in the backyard of the cathedral.⁶

When Charles was eighteen months old, his mother gave birth to a daughter, Agnes. After the little girl died at the age of three months, Amelia devoted herself to her surviving child. When Charles was still a small boy, Amelia became fixated on the idea of him entering the priesthood; she also attempted to control every detail of her son's life. Coughlin biographer Donald Warren describes Charles entering St. Mary's School at the age of five, "dressed in a white middie blouse and a pleated blue skirt, his brown hair in long ringlets." A priest greeting pupils at the boys' entrance of the school sent Charles back home to ask his mother whether he was a girl or a boy; Charles' ringlets were cut off that night and he returned to school the next day wearing pants.⁷

Historian Alan Brinkley theorizes that Amelia Coughlin's protectiveness and control seem to have influenced two important aspects of Coughlin's personality:

There was the brashness, the assertiveness, the almost boastful manliness, an implicit rebuff, perhaps, to his mother's efforts to pamper and refine him. But there was at the same time an expectation of constant solicitude and approval. Accustomed to being the center of attention and the recipient of acclaim, he grew

restless and irritable when he was not. They were expectations that, during his childhood at least, his mother seldom failed to satisfy.⁸

When Charles was twelve years old, priests at St. Mary's urged his parents to enroll him at St. Michael's prep school, which was attached to St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto. The prep school and college were run by the Basilian Fathers and were designed to prepare boys for the priesthood. After four years of high school, Charles entered the St. Michael's undergraduate division; he excelled both in his studies and on the athletic field. He also developed a talent as a public speaker, partly through his experiences as a member of the debate team and partly through what Brinkley calls Coughlin's "impromptu performances in the classroom." For instance, sometimes when called on to discuss assignments he had not read, Coughlin "simply made a little speech, often leaving his instructors so impressed by his eloquence that they overlooked his lack of preparation."⁹ The talented student graduated from St. Michael's in 1911, took a three-month trip to Europe, and then returned to Toronto to enter St. Basil's Seminary to begin formal study for the priesthood.

The Basilians emphasized both the study of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas and Catholic social activism. Coughlin and the other seminarians studied Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* ("On the Condition of the Working Class"). Ruth Mugglebee, a *Boston Globe* reporter who published an effusive biography of Coughlin in 1933, describes (in her overblown style) the impact the encyclical had on Coughlin:

Coughlin was excited to learn that the pontiff had promulgated this spirited manifesto, this defensive encyclical for the working classes, five months subsequent to his own birthday in the year of his birth. It fired his blood. He didn't know why he felt as he did, but he was enraptured....He was stunned by the striking simplicity with which the Workingmen's Pope condemned socialism, communism, and nihilism, at the same time championing the cause of the workers.¹⁰

Brinkley writes that Aquinas's concept of the just community resonated particularly clearly for Coughlin and his contemporaries. The economic needs of the individual were recognized, but, wrote Aquinas, those needs were qualified by the needs of one's neighbors.¹¹

The intelligent and articulate Coughlin adjusted well to the curriculum at St. Basil's. However, in the midst of his training, his superiors sent him to a Basilian college in Waco, Texas, for a year, where he taught philosophy and played baseball. Brinkley, theorizing that Coughlin may have found seminary life too austere, suggests that Coughlin's superiors may have sent him to Waco as an outlet for his restlessness.¹² When the year was up, Coughlin returned to Toronto and apparently settled well into seminary life.

Coughlin's oratorical skills brought him attention early – St. Basil's permitted him to deliver the Easter Sunday sermon in 1916, a rare honor for one who was not yet ordained. Three months later, on June 29, Coughlin was ordained to the priesthood. He became a teacher at Assumption College, a boys' college administered by the Basilians near Windsor, Ontario, close to Detroit, and embarked on a busy life of teaching English, history, and Greek, coaching football, and supervising the drama society. However, despite being popular with students and colleagues, Coughlin again appeared to become restless. After only a few months at Assumption, he persuaded his parents to sell their home in Hamilton and move to Windsor so he could see them more easily. He also began volunteering to provide weekend assistance at parishes in Windsor and Detroit. Brinkley writes that Coughlin's growing reputation for eloquence brought him invitations to speak

at meetings and banquets of Catholic organizations and even for secular groups such as Rotary Clubs and Chambers of Commerce.¹³

Coughlin was faced with a decision when the new code of Canon Law in 1918 directed that all pious sodalities of priests, such as the Basilians, were required to disband. Members of the sodalities had to choose between joining a religious congregation, such as the Redemptorists, or a religious order, such as the Franciscans or Benedictines. The alternative was to resign and become a diocesan priest. Coughlin was enjoying his notoriety as an orator in the Detroit area; also, he may have recalled that he sometimes found life with the Basilians chafing. He decided to resign from the order and join the diocese of Detroit.¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Brinkley points out that although he may not have realized it at the time, Coughlin was also severing his ties with Canada. He was already a citizen of the United States because of his father; when he joined the diocese of Detroit, Coughlin embarked on a residency in the United States that would extend for the rest of his life.¹⁷

Coughlin spent two years in Michigan serving as an assistant in parishes in Kalamazoo and downtown Detroit. His intelligence and organizational ability attracted the attention of Bishop Michael Gallagher, leader of the archdiocese of Detroit, who would become Coughlin's greatest supporter. Coughlin was made pastor of a parish in North Branch, Michigan, a tiny farming village with an equally tiny Catholic population. After only six months at North Branch, Bishop Gallagher assigned Coughlin to start a new parish in Royal Oak, Michigan.¹⁸

"There could hardly have been a less hospitable setting for an ambitious young priest attempting to establish a new church than Royal Oak, Michigan, in 1926," writes

Brinkley. Although it was only twelve miles from downtown Detroit, it had been an isolated rural community; as Detroit's industrial population pushed outward, Royal Oak became "a sort of intermediate, urbanizing wilderness."¹⁹ When Coughlin arrived, there were only twenty-five Catholic families in Royal Oak. Anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant bias prompted many older residents of the area to join the Ku Klux Klan. Mugglebee, in characteristic style, describes the atmosphere:

Prejudice and hatred, intolerance and religious bias, bitter anger and evil sparks of persecution charged the air. Machinations of the devil were born under the hooded regalia of ironic whiteness. Muttering men with burning, threatening, menacing eyes and formidable costumes – terrors of the night – surreptitiously moved with the darkness, too cowardly to face the scrutiny of daylight, to stench the air with their satanic cruelties of vile and bigoted misunderstanding.²⁰

Coughlin's new parish was designated as a shrine to the recently canonized St. Therese of Lisieux, the "Little Flower." It was composed mostly of autoworkers who historian David M. Kennedy describes as "just prosperous enough to move to suburbia from the soot and clang of Detroit's inner city." Kennedy points out that these lower-middle-class Catholics were "not the poorest Americans, but rather those who had managed to step up just a rung or two on the ladder of social mobility....The Depression had not so much impoverished them as it had swiftly checked their brave march toward realizing the American dream."²¹

The new pastor borrowed \$79,000 from the Archdiocese of Detroit to build a simple brown-shingled wooden church (seating capacity 600), which was completed in May 1926. Two weeks later, the Klan burned a cross on the front lawn. The incident was recreated in melodramatic fashion in an episode of the popular 1930s newsreel series *The March of Time*. Father Coughlin, shown studying at his desk, is roused by a hysterical housekeeper who tells him that the church is burning; the priest (portrayed by an actor)

rushes outside and beats out the fire as he rails against the Klan (“Bigots! Bigots!”) and vows to take his message to radio.²² Mugglebee provides an equally melodramatic description:

Then, when it was all over and the cross no longer glowed its ravishing incandescence, and the church remained unscathed and untouched by the brutality of black-hearted men, the priest shook himself free of dejection and turned to the small group around him. Father Coughlin lifted his noble face to the heavens, and with deep religious passion roared rebelliously, “Some day – we will build a church and raise its cross so high to the sky that neither man nor beast can burn it down.”²³

Brinkley suggests that Coughlin quite likely embellished the story for dramatic effect as the story was retold.²⁴ Warren likewise expresses doubts about aspects of the cross-burning incident.²⁵

Coughlin tried a number of unconventional ways to raise funds for his parish. He had ushers collect offerings at the exits instead of passing a collection basket (he reasoned that people would be more generous if they gave money directly to an usher). He once asked members of the Detroit Tigers baseball team to attend a service and help with fundraising. Not only did the Tigers do so, they even brought along Babe Ruth (the Yankees were in town), and the church collected several thousand dollars.²⁶ However, despite Coughlin’s entrepreneurial skills, raising money was a constant concern.

The financial situation brightened in October 1926, when Coughlin met Leo Fitzpatrick, the manager of Detroit radio station WJR. The priest mentioned his financial issues; Fitzpatrick, who was aware of Coughlin’s reputation as a talented preacher, suggested he try his hand at radio broadcasting as a way of creating a more favorable climate for Catholicism and to appeal for financial support.²⁷ Fitzpatrick offered free air time; Coughlin was asked only to pay the actual transmission costs, which were \$58 a

week. Coughlin secured Bishop Gallagher's approval and delivered his first radio sermon at 2 p.m. on Sunday, October 17, 1926, using a microphone specially installed in front of the altar at the Shrine of the Little Flower.^{28, 29}

Coughlin's foray into this new medium was timed perfectly. Radio broadcasting in the United States began in 1920, when Pittsburgh's KDKA covered the presidential election of 1920; stations then began emerging in other cities. Historian Lizabeth Cohen writes that radio appealed to the working class from the start because of its affordability in contrast to other modern technology like the automobile. Early radio was a hands-on hobby, with many people building their own sets. This, along with accusations of "low-brow" programming, led the "high-brow" elite to look down on radio; a series of studies revealed that upper-class people listened to radio least often, even when they owned one or more radios and despite efforts to attract them. As radio programming became more established in the 1930s, the audience expanded, but people with lower incomes continued to listen more than did the more affluent. Cohen reports:

A *Fortune* survey found that by 1938 listening to the radio was the nation's favorite pastime, just edging out movies and holding a clear advantage over reading....The increasingly sophisticated field of market research revealed that lower-income families particularly listened frequently. Another *Fortune* poll indicated that twice as many people on the lowest income level preferred radio to books and magazines, whereas on the highest income level the relationship was almost inverse.³⁰

Radio also began displacing the newspaper as the outlet from which Americans got their news; this became the case for all Americans but was especially so for those in the working class. The lower a person's economic status, the more likely he or she preferred radio over print.³¹ All these factors contributed to Coughlin's ability to reach a mass audience.

Coughlin was not the first priest to use the radio; the Paulist Fathers had been giving talks on religious subjects since the early 1920s. However, Coughlin was the first to be aired regularly. His earliest programs were directed to children; the first title of his broadcast was “The Children’s Hour.”³² However, as Coughlin began attracting adult listeners, his program became “The Golden Hour of the Little Flower.” It soon became obvious that Coughlin had a gift for the medium. WJR’s Fitzpatrick remarked on the priest’s talent:

Father Coughlin clicked....He stuck to religious sermons, but he had a style that was different. His voice registered well over the radio and his enunciation was unusually pleasing. First there was a musical program and then he spoke. He was a knockout “radio-ically” [*sic*] speaking.³³

The author Wallace Stegner described the priest’s voice as

one of such mellow richness, such manly, heart-warming, confidential intimacy, such emotional and ingratiating charm, that anyone turning past it almost automatically returned to hear it again. It was without a doubt one of the great speaking voices of the twentieth century. Warmed by the touch of Irish brogue, it lingered over words and enriched their emotional content. It was a voice made for promises.³⁴

Network radio pioneer Frank Stanton agreed that the priest was “the greatest voice of the twentieth century,” adding:

Coughlin was ahead of the industry and had a better grasp of what the medium could do in the area of ideas than the industry did. The industry...looked upon radio as an advertising medium and didn’t make the connection between the use of the medium for selling merchandise and the use of the medium for moving ideas.³⁵

Communications studies scholar Ronald H. Carpenter describes Coughlin’s appeal to his listeners:

Because Father Coughlin was spectacular, colorful, and passionate in his delivery, people found it easy to attend to him; and that quality of vivacity pervaded what his listeners heard only as sound waves. Moreover, the artistry of the priest’s

delivery was not a matter of happenstance but rather one of careful cultivation. He prepared well.²⁶

Coughlin began getting more and more mail, not only from Detroit but from throughout Michigan and from neighboring states within the range of WJR's strong signal, including Ohio. Monetary contributions began accompanying the correspondence; most of them were small amounts, but the large volume helped assuage the Shrine's financial difficulties.

Coughlin's increasing notoriety made his need for assistance evident. He hired a number of secretaries to manage his mail and keep track of his finances, and Bishop Gallagher approved Coughlin's request that an assistant priest be assigned to the Shrine. Less than six months after his broadcast debut, Coughlin organized the Radio League of the Little Flower, with chapters in almost every state and in Ireland, England, Australia, and New Zealand; people were asked to contribute one dollar annually.³⁷ Brinkley describes the League as "simply a fund-raising mailing list. It had no formal duties or activities, but it did encourage Coughlin's admirers to contribute generously and regularly."³⁸ The brightening financial outlook permitted Coughlin to begin construction of the church of his dreams: New York architect Henry McGill designed (to Coughlin's specifications) a huge octagonal structure (with a seating capacity of 2,600) topped by a granite tower 111 feet high, which displayed a huge figure of the crucified Christ.³⁹

The new Shrine of the Little Flower soon became a popular pilgrimage destination. A brochure advertising "Cleveland Day" at the Shrine attests to Coughlin's appeal beyond Michigan state lines. A round-trip ticket for \$6.95 covered rail transportation between Cleveland and Detroit, lunch and dinner, and sightseeing in Detroit and Royal Oak. The brochure described the program at the Shrine:

Solemn High Mass, sung by a double vested choir. Father Coughlin will preach the sermon; personally welcome you and your friends and explain the symbolism of the Church. You will be shown through the beautiful Rose Garden, lined with beds of the “little flowers,” so beloved by St. Therese; the Stations of the Cross, on the site of the old church, burned a few years ago; the beautiful Statue of St. Therese, saved miraculously from the fire, together with the original Communion Rail, also rescued from the blaze.⁴⁰

The description of artifacts miraculously saved from a fire is mysterious. The Klan cross-burning was confined to the lawn of the earlier church (even Mugglebee writes that the fire did not spread to the church), and the historical record mentions no other subsequent fire.⁴¹ Coughlin’s flair for showmanship likely encouraged him to embellish the story to make it even more appealing to pilgrims. Whatever its exaggerations, the excursion program underscores Coughlin’s popularity in the Cleveland area:

The occasion will mark the formal dedication by Father Coughlin of a Stone inlaid in the Shrine and donated by devout Catholics of the State of Ohio. It will be “Cleveland Day” at the historic Shrine – an opportunity for you to see and worship in this famous Memorial to the beloved St. Therese of the Child Jesus. A glorious day, indeed, in a setting of charm and spiritual gladness – a trip you will long remember.⁴²

The brochure made it clear that Coughlin’s appeal stretched beyond the Great Lakes region:

From every city and village upon the Eastern seaboard, across the broad expanse of land to the hamlets and metropolitan areas of the wide Pacific, from many homes and dwellings of the sunny South and the mansions and cabins of the cities and villages bordering upon the Great Lakes, will come caravans carrying pilgrims and visitors to the Shrine of the Little Flower.⁴³

Not surprisingly, Coughlin’s popularity on the air was also increasing. WMAQ in Chicago and WLW in Cincinnati began carrying his broadcasts, and increasing monetary contributions arriving in the mail covered the transmission costs. The savvy Coughlin purchased his radio time directly from the stations rather than allowing broadcasters to market his program to sponsors.⁴⁴ In fall 1930, the priest climbed another rung on the

radio ladder when his program began airing on the CBS network, giving him access to a national audience of up to 40 million people.⁴⁵ Although Coughlin's popularity reached across religious and economic lines, his strongest support was from Irish and German Catholics in the larger cities (as was the case in Cleveland).⁴⁶ As Coughlin's popularity grew, the volume of mail arriving in Royal Oak did likewise; within three weeks of his first CBS broadcast, so many letters arrived that fifty-five clerks were needed to process the mail. As the amount of mail increased, a new post office in Royal Oak was built to handle the bags of mail arriving almost daily for the Radio Priest.⁴⁷

Coughlin's topics during his first three years on the air were generally uncontroversial and kept to religious themes, although he did attack the Ku Klux Klan and, later, supporters of birth control. However, a series of sermons in 1928 attacked Norman Thomas, the Socialist Party candidate for president.^{48, 49} By 1930, Coughlin began to venture into politics more deeply. The reasons for this shift, writes Brinkley, were no mystery:

Even early in 1930, the social effects of the stock-market crash the previous fall and the steadily worsening economy since were becoming evident – in the unemployment rate, the bank closings, and the falling consumer prices. By the end of the year, the signs of the Depression were everywhere. Detroit, a city almost entirely dependent upon the state of the automobile industry, suffered particularly severely.⁵⁰

Historian Michael Kazin describes Coughlin as a new type of evangelical populist who

stirred a potent blend of convictions: the fervent advocacy of Catholic social doctrine, hostility toward high finance and a shadowy state, and the desire for an uncompromising leader to point the way out of the Depression....Like the moribund prohibitionists, he spoke more to his followers' loss of psychological security and the nation's apparent fall from social harmony than to the oppression of American workers.⁵¹

Coughlin's broadcast of January 12, 1930, entitled "Christ or the Red Serpent," attacked communism and warned that the United States was being corrupted from within by the "purple poison of Bolshevism." That was followed by another anticommunist sermon the following week, "Christ or the Red Fog."^{52, 53} By the fall 1930 broadcast season, Coughlin began speaking more about the domestic conditions that might contribute to the spread of communism in the United States. Brinkley identifies a shift by the priest away from emphasizing the perils of communism and socialism to speaking in more populist terms, denouncing "greed," "corruption," and "the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few."⁵⁴ More and more, Coughlin began criticizing the American economic system and advocating a redefinition of the structure and goals of the domestic American society.⁵⁵

Coughlin planned to give a radio sermon entitled "Prosperity" for his first broadcast in January 1931. However, in place of the sermon, Coughlin's office issued a press release stating that CBS had informed the priest that "a considerable number of protests had come to its attention regarding his sermons." Instead of "Prosperity," Coughlin appealed to his listeners to express to the network their opinion as to whether they wanted Coughlin's radio sermons to continue. Warren describes the outcome:

The next day, as CBS was flooded with an estimated 350,000 letters, Coughlin penned an "open letter," addressed to "my friends," in which he compared the state of American society to the eve of the French Revolution and referred to "a cowardly behind-the-back attack [being] made against the 'Golden Hour' with the hope of throttling free speech."⁵⁶

The following Sunday, January 11, Coughlin did deliver the "Prosperity" sermon, presenting his thesis that "international financiers" (which he often used as a code term for Jews) had caused the stock market crash of 1929 and linking that event to the ideas of

“Karl Marx, a Hebrew.”⁵⁷ This signaled the emergence of an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in Coughlin’s statements; his anti-Semitism would become more pronounced as the decade of the 1930s advanced. The “Prosperity” sermon also denounced the Treaty of Versailles as an “evil” document that was responsible for many of the current financial problems besetting the United States.⁵⁸

Although CBS had backed off after receiving the torrent of letters supporting Coughlin, the network faced a dilemma when Coughlin continued to broadcast “inflammatory” sermons. When the priest’s contract expired in April 1931, CBS refused to renew it; the network maintained that the decision had nothing to do with Coughlin himself but to a new policy against selling air time to religious groups. NBC also declined to sell air time to the priest.⁵⁹

The two networks’ refusal proved to be no problem for Coughlin. He had become so popular that he was able to assemble his own independent network of stations. By early 1932, the network included twenty-seven stations covering an area from Kansas City, Missouri, to Bangor, Maine; by late 1934, thirty stations, covering most of the nation, aired the Golden Hour of the Little Flower.^{60, 61}

Coughlin began heaping criticism on President Herbert Hoover and his administration as the presidential election of 1932 approached, castigating Hoover for failing to do enough to combat the Depression and for not supporting the soldiers’ bonus bill. In February 1932, the priest referred to Hoover as “the banker’s friend, the Holy Ghost of the rich, the protective angel of Wall Street.”⁶²

Coughlin and Franklin Delano Roosevelt met for the first time in early 1932, and the priest became an enthusiastic supporter of Roosevelt. Although Coughlin told

Roosevelt that he could not openly endorse him, he made it clear that he could publically support the candidate's political views. Brinkley writes that while the priest never mentioned Roosevelt by name in his broadcasts during the campaign, Coughlin's fierce attacks on Hoover left no doubt as to which candidate he favored. When Roosevelt won a resounding victory, including polling particularly well in urban Catholic districts where Coughlin considered his influence strongest, the priest interpreted the results as evidence of his own contribution to the Democratic win.⁶³

Coughlin praised Roosevelt lavishly in his radio sermons throughout most of 1933, almost to the point of embarrassment, writes Brinkley. Members of the Roosevelt administration were ambivalent about the priest – appreciative of the support but at the same time uneasy. Brinkley writes that Roosevelt himself reportedly was suspicious of Coughlin from the day they met, seeing the priest as unpredictable and potentially dangerous. As time passed, members of the administration also developed a distaste for Coughlin, who began acting as if he were part of the administration (he even took to calling the president “the Boss”). Because Coughlin was so popular, he had to be treated politely; however, the growing ideological differences between the priest and the president became increasingly problematic.⁶⁴

Coughlin continued to praise Roosevelt into the early part of 1934. Testifying before the House Committee on Coinage, Weights and Measures in January, the priest maintained:

President Roosevelt is not going to make a mistake, for God Almighty is guiding him....President Roosevelt has leadership, he has followers and he is the answer to many prayers that were sent up last year. If Congress fails to carry through with the President's suggestions, I foresee a revolution far greater than the French Revolution. It is either Roosevelt or Ruin.⁶⁵

Thereafter, however, fault lines began to appear. Coughlin became impatient with New Deal monetary policies, including a disagreement over the remonetization of silver, of which Coughlin was a strong advocate. The priest felt slighted by the administration when he was not appointed to be an economic adviser to the London Economic Conference in June 1933, even though six senators and fifty-nine representatives had petitioned Roosevelt on the priest's behalf.⁶⁶

Although Coughlin began expressing ambivalence toward New Deal policies by mid-1934, he was not ready to make a firm break away from Roosevelt. Things began to shift later that year, however, and Powell notes that a careful analysis of the priest's radio messages during fall 1934 indicate that Coughlin was on the verge of becoming openly critical of the New Deal. The man who had insisted that "the New Deal is Christ's Deal" only six months earlier opened his 1934-1935 broadcast season by stating that "more than ever I am in favor of *a* New Deal."⁶⁷

Coughlin's next step in breaking away from Roosevelt was announced on November 11, 1934: his establishment of the National Union for Social Justice (NUSJ). Coughlin called upon his listeners "to organize for social united action which will be founded on God-given social truths."⁶⁸ The organization's Sixteen Principles advocated for a living annual wage, control of private property for the public good, absolute government control of all currency, a fair profit for the farmer, the right of labor to organize, and the priority of human rights over property rights.⁶⁹ Although Coughlin maintained that the NUSJ was not a political party, Kennedy disputes this:

In all but name, it was a new political party, or certainly aspired to be. In all but its demographic base, it resurrected the Populist movement of the 1890s, complete with monetary obsessions, conspiracy theories, cranky anti-internationalism, and innuendos of anti-Semitism.⁷⁰

Brinkley sees the establishment of the NUSJ as part of Coughlin's strategy to recover his perceived rightful place on the American political stage:

Coughlin was hoping that the existence of a vast new pressure group under his control could do for him what his speeches and lobbying efforts alone could not: restore him to what he believed was his rightful position as an important policy-making influence in Washington. Members of Congress and officials of the executive departments would look upon him with renewed respect if he could give them concrete evidence of his enormous following; even the President, who Coughlin still believed had been turned against him by advisors, would once again show him the deference he deserved.⁷¹

Coughlin did not have to wait long for an opportunity to confront the Roosevelt administration. On January 16, 1935, Roosevelt asked for approval of a treaty providing for American affiliation with the World Court, seated at The Hague. Although some of the president's advisors believed that the proposal to join the Court was a political error, Kennedy writes that Roosevelt intended it as a gesture to reach out to the international community.⁷² Coughlin vehemently disagreed. On Sunday, January 27, only two days before the Senate vote on the treaty, Coughlin delivered a radio sermon entitled "The Menace of the World Court." He railed against the treaty, saying that the Senate was about "to hand over our national sovereignty to the World Court"; rather than rescuing the country "from the hands of the international bankers," the administration was "ready to join hands with the Rothchilds [*sic*] and Lazerre [*sic*] Freres, with the Warburgs and Morgans and Kuhn Loeb's to keep the world safe for the inevitable slaughter." He encouraged members of the NUSJ to make their voices heard: "Today...tomorrow may be too late – today, whether you can afford it or not, send your Senators telegrams telling them to vote 'no' on our entrance into the World Court."⁷³

Coughlin's followers did not disappoint him. "Prodded by the isolationist Hearst press, Coughlin's vast audience responded with an avalanche of telegrams, wheelbarrowed by the hundreds of thousands into the Senate Office Building on the morning of Monday, January 28," writes Kennedy.⁷⁴ The next day, the treaty failed to get enough votes for ratification. The defeat may not have been due totally to Coughlin's efforts; Brinkley notes that public opinion had been overwhelmingly opposed to membership in the Court even before Coughlin's broadcast. However, most observers credited Coughlin with playing a leading role.⁷⁵ It was a stinging blow to Roosevelt.

Coughlin, exultant at the rebuke he had delivered to the president, planned his next move. Announcing that "our next goal is to clean out the international bankers," the priest proposed major banking and currency-reform legislation of his own.⁷⁶ However, although Coughlin had created the NUSJ to be "an articulate, organized lobby of the people," Brinkley remarks that by April 1935 "it was becoming clear that it was neither articulate nor organized enough."⁷⁷ Coughlin decided to embark on a speaking tour to promote the NUSJ. After opening in Detroit, the tour moved to Cleveland on May 8, 1935, when the priest spoke to a huge crowd at Public Hall. Coughlin spoke passionately, attacking Ohio Senator Robert J. Bulkley for his opposition to the soldiers' bonus bill. Coughlin followed his Cleveland address with a speaking engagement at New York's Madison Square Garden, where an enthusiastic crowd of 18,000 brandished signs hailing the priest as "The Modern Patrick Henry," "President Coughlin," and "Our Next President."⁷⁸

A satisfied Coughlin returned to Michigan after his New York appearance believing that he had revitalized the NUSJ. However, apart from receiving much media

attention and attracting some new supporters, the tour failed to accomplish its objective. Although Coughlin had said he would speak throughout the East and Midwest, he visited only Detroit, Cleveland, and New York. He had no meetings with local NUSJ organizers in any of these three cities, and, when a reporter in New York asked about local representatives of the organization, the priest gave an astonishing reply: "I am the Union for Social Justice. There are no representatives here." Instead of capitalizing on the attention his speeches had gained, Coughlin went on vacation for the summer.⁷⁹ Most importantly, writes Brinkley, Coughlin seemed to be uncertain about what he and the NUSJ were supposed to do.⁸⁰ Kazin notes that although the NUSJ had perhaps a million members (and claimed many more), "Its local chapters seem to have been either glorified Coughlin fan clubs or abortive vehicles for individuals who linked their personal rage to a figure of national prominence."⁸¹ Kazin maintains that the lack of an agenda was the major flaw of the NUSJ:

The sixteen principles of the organization were an abstract, personal credo – the proclamation of a future political heaven. Coughlin never ordered his members to wage a campaign for any plank in particular (even the narrow Number 12 – "the abolition of tax-exempt bonds")....The most famous priest in America thus had no conception of how to convert his adoring audience into a durable movement. With admirers arriving daily by the busload to view his elaborate floodlit headquarters in Royal Oak, filling big arenas to hear his speeches, and buying reproductions of his portrait, Coughlin could ignore his failings as a political leader.⁸²

Coughlin launched a weekly newspaper, *Social Justice*, on March 13, 1936.

Although E. Perrin Schwartz, who had been city editor of the *Milwaukee Journal*, was listed as the official editor of the paper, Coughlin controlled most of the content.^{83, 84} Despite the priest's denial that he had any ambitions to start a third political party, he used his newspaper to urge his supporters to become involved in the upcoming

congressional elections. By early April, Coughlin was soundly criticizing both political parties. Coughlin saw the NUSJ's role as that of a civic-minded third force which could ignore party labels and support candidates on their individual merits; the priest declared, "The stupidity of voting for a person because he waves the Republican black banner of reaction or because he flaunts the pink pennant of New Deal Democracy is outmoded."⁸⁵

Coughlin-supported candidates were successful in some state Congressional primaries. In Pennsylvania, of thirty-two candidates supported by the NUSJ, twelve won. Coughlin's influence seemed to be even stronger in Ohio. He actively campaigned for some of the thirty-two NUSJ-endorsed candidates (including a well-publicized rally at Cleveland Municipal Stadium on May 10, 1936); seventeen of these candidates won. The NUSJ also took credit for primary wins in Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Wisconsin.⁸⁶

However, the role of Coughlin and the NUSJ might not have been as critical as it first seemed, observes Brinkley. He writes that this was especially true in Ohio:

In Cleveland, for example, several National Union-sponsored candidates (including Coughlin's long-time ally Representative Martin Sweeney) won nomination, but political observers noted that the vote reflected less love for Father Coughlin than disenchantment with the entrenched, conservative local machine. Nor did the outcome represent any genuine animosity toward the Roosevelt Administration. Most observers believed that New Deal candidates, if any had been available, would have triumphed in many of the contests; and to those who supported the President, almost anyone was preferable to the tired, corrupt, and myopic members of the local Democratic organization, whose hostility to Roosevelt had long been manifest.⁸⁷

Coughlin was buoyed by the primary results, however. His earlier reluctance to support a third-party candidate for president evaporated; the candidate who materialized was William Lemke, described by Brinkley as "a short, unprepossessing, second-term Congressman from North Dakota." Lemke had earned a modest reputation in the

Midwest for his strong support of agrarian dissidents. He had co-sponsored legislation to insure farmers against foreclosures on their property, and was most notable for his work on behalf of the Frazier-Lemke bill in early 1936, which provided for government refinancing of all farm mortgages and for a major inflation of the money supply. The Roosevelt administration opposed the bill, which suffered a humiliating defeat, prompting the embittered Lemke to develop an abiding hatred of Roosevelt. Coughlin had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Frazier-Lemke bill, and the two men became united in their dislike for the president; that shared antipathy became the focus of the Coughlin-Lemke relationship.⁸⁸

On June 19, 1936, Coughlin announced his support for Lemke as the presidential candidate of the newly formed Union Party, which was a coalition of the supporters of Dr. Francis Townsend's Old-Age Revolving Pension Society, the Share Our Wealth Society (headed by Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith, successor to the slain Huey Long), and Coughlin's followers. In his June 19 radio broadcast, Coughlin finally renounced his earlier support of Roosevelt:

At last, when the most brilliant minds among the industrialists, bankers, and their kept politicians had failed to solve these questions on the principles upon which the Old Deal had operated, there appeared upon the scene of our national life a new champion of the people, Franklin D. Roosevelt....Never since the days of the gentle Master and His Sermon on the Mount were such humanitarian principles enunciated....It is not pleasant for me who coined the phrase "Roosevelt or ruin" – a phrase based upon promises – to voice such passionate words. But I am constrained to admit that "Roosevelt *and* ruin is the order of the day because the money changers have not been driven from the temple."⁸⁹

Because Lemke was a strong supporter of agriculture, it was hoped that he would attract the farmer vote. Boston labor attorney and former prosecutor Thomas C. O'Brien

became the Union Party's vice-presidential candidate, based on the notion that his addition to the ticket would appeal to Catholics and the urban labor vote.⁹⁰

As the presidential campaign got underway in summer, the Union Party was widely considered to be a potentially important factor in the race. Although most observers did not believe Lemke could win, there was a strong feeling that he could draw away enough votes from Roosevelt to ensure the election of the Republican candidate, Alfred Landon.⁹¹ In Stegner's view, Coughlin believed that the Union Party ticket had a chance to carry enough states to prevent a majority for either party, thus throwing the election into the House of Representatives. Coughlin himself hoped that such a show of strength in 1936 would bode even better for the Union Party in 1940.⁹²

Since the new party needed to display its strength early in the campaign, Coughlin and Gerald L. K. Smith arranged to speak at the national convention of the Townsend organization in Cleveland in July. Bennett describes the Townsendites:

The procession of people – gray, simple, sixtyish, and poor – converged on Cleveland from all across the nation. Arriving in busses and railroad coaches and broken-down Fords, they came bringing battered suitcases and found dollar-a-night lodgings, rooms without baths in tourist camps in the city's outskirts. They traveled to the downtown convention hall in trolleys, eating fruit out of paper bags to save lunch money. Penniless but respectable, they had come as to a revival meeting to reaffirm their dedication to the cause.⁹³

In addition to Townsend himself, Smith, Lemke, and Coughlin were scheduled to speak. Reporters from all over the country were present to witness the great coming together of the three insurgent movements.

Things did not go quite as expected. As Brinkley reports:

The audiences were enthusiastic enough, but not always in ways the leadership found encouraging. When a speaker during the first session warmly praised Franklin Roosevelt, the delegates cheered lustily. When only hours later another delegate rose to excoriate the President, they cheered again. Townsend himself

spoke on behalf of the Lemke candidacy, but without notable enthusiasm. And while the delegates obligingly voted to endorse the Union Party ticket, it was evident that their first concerns lay elsewhere. On the final morning of the convention, Lemke arrived at Cleveland's enormous Municipal Stadium to speak to what party organizers had hoped would be a crowd of 80,000 people. Only 5,000 showed up.⁹⁴

Coughlin, planning to deliver the climactic speech of the convention, had arranged to be the final speaker at the last evening session. When Smith preceded him with "one of the finest rabble-rousing, Bible quoting harangues ever given at a national convention," Coughlin fidgeted nervously in the back of the hall, annoyed at being upstaged.^{95, 96} When it was the priest's turn to speak, after the screaming standing ovation for Smith had ended, he launched into a vicious attack on Roosevelt. Coughlin became so exercised that he removed first his coat and then his clerical collar as he denounced the president as a "betrayor," a "liar," and a "double-crosser."⁹⁷ Stegner comments wryly, "Coughlin had sassed Cardinals before, but he had never before called the President a liar."⁹⁸

The nation's eyes again were on Cleveland only a month later when Coughlin, Smith, Townsend, and Lemke returned to the city for the first annual convention of the National Union for Social Justice. This gathering was to be Coughlin's show; historian Charles J. Tull reports, "The atmosphere resembled that of a religious revival rather than a political meeting. The faithful eagerly snapped up 11,500 portraits of the radio priest at 25 cents each."⁹⁹ Roosevelt scholar William E. Leuchtenburg provides further evidence that the Coughlin supporters were convinced that Father knew best:

Throughout the proceedings, Coughlin was called simply "Father": "Father says," "Father thinks," "Father told us." In her speech nominating him as president of the National Union, Helen Elizabeth Martin of the Bronx told delegates that "for those of us who haven't a material father – whose father is in the Great Beyond – he can be our father, and we won't need to feel lonesome." A Maryland delegate

proposed: “Resolved, that we give thanks to the mother of the Reverend Charles E. Coughlin for bearing him.”¹⁰⁰

Coughlin kept tight control of the proceedings, including scheduling other leaders to speak at inauspicious times.¹⁰¹ Coughlin remembered the frenzied reception Smith had received for his speech at the Townsend convention, so he scheduled Smith to speak at dinner time, when the delegates would be hungry and tired. However, Smith outfoxed Coughlin again by delivering “an exemplary demagogic performance”; the miffed Coughlin “squirmed in his seat, talked to his friends, grinned slyly at those around him, and elaborately pretended to go to sleep – anything to detract attention from the spellbinding Smith.”¹⁰²

Coughlin spoke to an enthusiastic crowd of 42,000 delegates at Cleveland Municipal Stadium the next day. The PBS documentary film *The Radio Priest*, which includes footage from the event, shows a large crowd on the hot August day listening raptly to the priest’s words. At one point, Coughlin told the audience:

You appreciate the fact, my dear friends, that, among other things in the National Union for Social Justice, we are Christians in so far as we believe in Christ’s principle of love your neighbor as yourself, and with that principle I challenge every Jew in this nation to tell me that he does not believe in it. [*Much cheering; Coughlin mops his brow.*] When men become so prideful that they believe their destiny is to rewrite the eternal law of God, it’s time for their fellow citizens to rise up in their wrath and, through the agency of ballots and not bullets, to relegate them to the pages of the past.¹⁰³

As Coughlin was building to a climax, alleging that President Roosevelt and his advisor Rexford G. Tugwell were “communistic,” he stepped back from the microphone and collapsed.¹⁰⁴ Brinkley describes the scene:

There was a stunned silence as aides rushed him to a hospital, and the shaken delegates quickly knelt to pray for their leader’s recovery. They need not have worried. It was, doctors explained, simply a case of exhaustion; some were ungracious enough to suggest that it had been even less serious than that – a

carefully staged attention-getting device. Whatever the explanation, it was evident that Coughlin was not entirely himself, that the frustrations of the campaign were taking their toll.¹⁰⁵

Indeed, the campaign was not going well. Divisions within the Union Party deepened. Townsend and Lemke rebuked Smith when he declared that he planned to “seize the government of the United States.” Coughlin called Townsend’s pension plan “economic insanity,” while Townsend remarked that Coughlin’s Sixteen Principles had “fourteen points too many.”¹⁰⁶

As support for the Union Party ticket dwindled, Coughlin’s anti-Semitism became more pronounced, and his rhetoric became more violent. This trend was most obvious in comments Coughlin made in an NUSJ rally in Cincinnati on September 25, 1936. In addition to asserting that Roosevelt was “anti-God,” Coughlin advocated “the use of bullets when any upstart dictator in the United States succeeds in making a one-party government and when the ballot is useless.”¹⁰⁷ Archbishop John T. McNicholas of the Cincinnati archdiocese rebuked Coughlin for his remarks:

I am making no statement for or against President Roosevelt, for or against the Republican, Democratic or Union party, but I am insisting, as a public moral teacher, that Father Coughlin transcends bounds if he made the statement attributed to him – that President Roosevelt is anti-God....The mere suggestion of advocating a revolution even in the heat of oratory is most dangerous. Whatever be his intention, Father Coughlin gives the impression that he appeals to force. In doing so he is morally in error. There is no excuse for inciting in the people a spirit of violent rebellion against conditions which do not actually exist and may never exist.¹⁰⁸

Speaking in Philadelphia on September 26, Coughlin did not mention Archbishop McNicholas by name but reiterated the statements he had made in Cincinnati. He contended that New Deal policy was “a program of destruction [that] is un-Christian. It is

anti-God; it is just downright asinine.” Asserting that “no red-blooded American” would disagree with his statement on “bullets,” Coughlin continued:

If and when that day will arrive – and God forbid it – if and when ballots have proved useless, then as one American, imbued with the tradition of Washington, I shall not disdain using bullets for the preservation of liberty of conscience and liberty of the Constitution.¹⁰⁹

Bishop Joseph Schrembs of the Diocese of Cleveland supported Archbishop McNicholas’ criticisms of Coughlin, regretting that Coughlin “had been carried away in the heat of oratory” in his Cincinnati speech. The Cleveland bishop called Coughlin’s accusation that Roosevelt was “anti-God” a “harsh statement, in my opinion not justified by the facts”; he also deplored Coughlin’s reference to “bullets” as “unfortunate,” adding that the United States definitely had not “reached the stage [Coughlin] was talking about.”¹¹⁰

However, Coughlin refused to temper his inflammatory accusations against Roosevelt and members of his cabinet. In early October, Monsignor John A. Ryan of the Catholic University of America, who was Director of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, spoke out against Coughlin. Coughlin’s assertions of communism against the president and his advisors were “ugly, cowardly, and flagrant calumnies,” said Ryan, adding that “the charge of communism directed at President Roosevelt is the silliest, falsest, most cruel and unjust accusation ever made against a President in all the years of American history.” Ryan also criticized Coughlin’s monetary theories as being ninety percent incorrect.¹¹¹ Coughlin responded by mockingly calling Ryan “the Right Reverend New Dealer” and the “ecclesiastical spokesman for the Democratic National Committee.”¹¹²

As if such vituperative name-calling was not bad enough, the results on Election Day were even worse for Coughlin. The Union Party suffered a humiliating defeat. Roosevelt won in a landslide, carrying forty-six of the forty-eight states; the totals of the popular vote were 27,747,636 (60.6%) for Roosevelt, 16,679,543 (36.0%) for Landon, and 892,492 (2.0%) for Lemke. Roosevelt carried all twelve of the states in which Coughlin had campaigned.¹¹³ Historian Robert S. McElvaine compares the pre-1936 size of the Coughlin, Townsend, and Smith movements with the feeble vote Lemke attracted and concludes that it was not wealth-sharing or social justice that the voters rejected but rather the “proto-fascist actions of Smith, and, to a lesser extent at this time, Coughlin.”¹¹⁴ McElvaine adds that pressure from the left had pushed Roosevelt to “take some steps that at least gave the appearance of a move in that direction on his part. The ‘Second New Deal’ brought voters back into the Roosevelt camp in droves.”¹¹⁵

At the NUSJ convention in August, Coughlin had promised, “If I don’t deliver 9,000,000 votes for William Lemke, I’m through with radio forever.”¹¹⁶ After the election, Coughlin made good on his promise to leave the airwaves – for six weeks. On January 1, 1937, the priest made a “temporary” return to radio to send a New Year’s message to his friends and supporters; he added that he would resume broadcasting if his supporters demonstrated their loyalty by raising the circulation of *Social Justice* from 600,000 to 1,500,000 (the goal was subsequently lowered to 1,250,000).¹¹⁷ When Bishop Gallagher, Coughlin’s close friend and stalwart defender, died on January 20, Coughlin returned to the air four days later, explaining that Bishop Gallagher’s last request had been that Coughlin resume broadcasting.¹¹⁸

Although Coughlin continued to attract a large audience, Brinkley notes that Coughlin “seemed to have lost some of the old fire, and increasingly his sermons displayed only a crude and embittered conservatism....[W]hile he retained an audience, it was a different, less committed audience.”¹¹⁹ Money did not roll in as it had in prior years. Bishop Gallagher’s successor, Archbishop Edward A. Mooney, began reining in Coughlin; in October 1937, Mooney publicly rebuked Coughlin for his criticisms of President Roosevelt and Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black and for alleging that the newly formed Congress of Industrial Organizations was a communist organization.¹²⁰ Coughlin, bristling at his superior’s “censorship,” once again withdrew from broadcasting, only to resume in 1938.

Coughlin returned to criticizing the New Deal both in his broadcasts and in the pages of *Social Justice*. The undercurrent of anti-Semitism that he had displayed in the past became overt and increasingly ugly. When war broke out in Europe in 1939, Coughlin vehemently opposed any involvement by the United States. He also spoke admiringly of aspects of Italian fascism and German Nazism: the March 27, 1940, issue of *Social Justice* defended Mussolini’s persecution of the Jews on the grounds that “most Jews were anti-Fascist,” and the April 3 issue praised the Rome-Berlin Axis as “a firm rampart against Communism” and included Hitler’s photograph on the back cover.¹²¹

Coughlin’s remaining support began to evaporate, and he was criticized by Jewish organizations, Catholic leaders, and the press. Brinkley writes, “Archbishop Mooney rebuked him repeatedly; radio stations began to refuse to carry his broadcasts; newspapers and magazines portrayed him as a public menace.”¹²² Early in 1940, the National Association of Broadcasters drafted a new code that prohibited all

“controversial” speakers from buying radio time unless they appeared on some form of panel with others expressing divergent views; Tull states that the new code was aimed specifically at Coughlin.¹²³

By the end of 1940, Coughlin had virtually no access to the air, but he continued to publish his views in *Social Justice*, making anti-Semitic remarks and praising the superior strength of the Axis powers.¹²⁴ Brinkley describes the Radio Priest’s exit from the national stage less than six months after the United States entered World War II following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor:

In the spring of 1942, finally, Postmaster General Frank Walker barred [*Social Justice*] from the mails, and Attorney General Francis Biddle warned Archbishop Mooney that Coughlin would face formal charges of sedition if his public activities did not cease. Early in May, Coughlin quietly announced that he had “bowed to orders from Church superiors,” that he was severing his ties to *Social Justice* and ceasing all political activities.¹²⁵

Coughlin was allowed to keep control of his parish and the Shrine of the Little Flower. The National Union for Social Justice was officially dissolved on August 17, 1944. In a December 1962 interview, the priest defended his anti-Roosevelt views of the 1930s but said that he now thought that U.S. presidents should not be criticized; he also stated that he had found the adjustment from his life as a nationally known radio orator to that of a parish priest very difficult.¹²⁶ As in his earlier days, Coughlin remained a study in contradiction. In 1970, when he was asked how he would live his life if he had it to do over again, he replied, “I would do it the same way.” However, when he was asked the same question two years later, he answered, “There is nothing I would do the same.”¹²⁷

Father Charles E. Coughlin remained at the Shrine of the Little Flower for twenty-four more years. Warren writes that the priest was financially comfortable after a lifetime of stock speculation and profitable investing for himself and his various enterprises,

including the Shrine of the Little Flower.¹²⁸ Ironically, the man who had championed the cause of the working class and railed against international financiers became a wealthy man. Just as in his heyday in the 1930s, few people involved with the Shrine were neutral toward Coughlin. Warren writes:

Parishioners and priests ranged from extravagant praise to bitter denunciation. There was an inner circle of deep loyalty, honed through decades of service, and they wielded a special kind of personal power that defined life at the Shrine. During the last years that Charles Coughlin served as its pastor, they were nicknamed “The Holy Ghosts.” Ever vigilant lest a new criticism emerge in print, they steadfastly shied away from interviews and kept in the shadows.¹²⁹

This sentiment was reiterated by Monsignor Edward Hickey, retired chancellor of the Archdiocese of Detroit, in the film *The Radio Priest*: “I think you couldn’t be neutral to Father Coughlin. I think you had to be with him or against him.”¹³⁰

Coughlin retired as pastor of the Shrine of the Little Flower in 1966. Brinkley states that the priest did so reluctantly, in response to pressure from the leaders of his diocese.¹³¹ Warren writes that “deep divisions had opened at the Shrine of the Little Flower. Many parents were opposed to what they considered Coughlin’s racist attitudes and his martinet style of interacting with school students and parents.”¹³²

Even in retirement, Coughlin continued to air his political views, writing essays in his parish paper supporting the presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater and warning about a communist conspiracy. Warren observes, “In all the remaining years of his life, Coughlin vainly sought some means to raise his voice beyond the confines of his local parish. Few were listening or cared to listen to the long-forgotten firebrand. He published nonetheless.”¹³³ Charles E. Coughlin died on October 27, 1979, six days after his eighty-eighth birthday.¹³⁴

PART II. NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

As Father Charles E. Coughlin's fame spread, Cleveland newspapers took notice. Captivated by the novelty of a Catholic priest who played a high-profile role on the political stage, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Cleveland Press* emphasized Coughlin's personality and oratorical skills in their news reports and feature stories. The editorial boards of both newspapers viewed the Radio Priest more critically, a stance that deepened over time as Coughlin became more divisive. The *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, the official newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, was more circumspect in its Coughlin coverage. In general, it focused on the social-justice aspects of Coughlin's message rather than reporting on the public's response to Coughlin. However, as the Radio Priest became more controversial, the *Universe Bulletin* also began viewing Coughlin with a strict eye.

Two months before Coughlin's first visit to the city, the *Cleveland Press* whetted the appetite of its readers with a profile of the orator of Royal Oak. Writer Willis Thornton described the Radio Priest's Michigan headquarters "high in the Crucifixion Tower that looks down across the level plain at Royal Oak" and mentioned the "vast files" recording membership in the National Union for Social Justice, which was "estimated as high as 6,000,000." Thornton wrote about the role of the NUSJ, which had been founded the previous November:

Future of the NUSJ as an organization is uncertain....The appeal for membership was on the basis of a non-partisan, non-sectarian organization, and there was to be a "board of legal advisers consisting of Catholic, Protestant, Jew and non-conformists," to help draw legislation to be lobbied. If such a board was ever appointed, public announcement was not made. Up to now, the NUSJ is Father Coughlin.

Thornton concluded his piece by speculating on the priest's future ambitions:

Though radicals freely accuse Father Coughlin of being the potential leader of an active Fascist movement, he has never given any indication that he wishes executive position for himself. Nevertheless, Roy M. Harrop, national chairman of the Farmer-Labor Party, is quoted as saying that Father Coughlin is the leading candidate for the presidential nomination by a third party which is to hold a national convention in Omaha next July. For the future, Father Coughlin and his National Union will be whatever his radio listeners (and their cash contributions) choose to make them.¹³⁵

The next day, the *Press* reprinted the NUSJ's Sixteen Principles in their entirety "because of numerous requests on the part of readers of The Press."¹³⁶

Coughlin made his first visit to Cleveland for a speech in Public Hall on May 8, 1935. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Cleveland Press*, and *Catholic Universe Bulletin* gave the speech substantial front-page coverage.

The May 9, 1935, *Plain Dealer* made Coughlin's speech the top story on page one ("Coughlin Hits Roosevelt Bank Bill: 24,508 Also Hear Blast at Bulkley.") The article featured a four-column-wide photograph of the throng in Public Hall with the caption "Hall Where Orator Packs in Thousands." Reporter John W. Vance, noting that the crowd was the largest in Public Hall history, described Coughlin coming onstage "at 9:42 p.m., entering from the west side of the stage as the band struck up a lively march" and being met by Congressman Martin L. Sweeney, "chairman of the meeting and sponsor in Congress of the Nye-Sweeney bill to carry through the priest's banking ideas." Coughlin's speech (one hour and twenty-five minutes long) was combative. The priest declared that the Eccles banking bill aimed at "making the president of the United States the financial dictator of the United States" and planned to "secure the ownership of the Federal Reserve banking system in the hands of a few owners." Coughlin continued with sensational language:

If you analyze this new bill, now being sponsored by Mr. Roosevelt, you will discover that it is nothing more than a marriage license between a prostitute who has wrecked our home and the government who has deserted his wife, the American people. The National Union will not give its benediction to this unholy alliance.

Vance described a “personal attack” Coughlin made on U. S. Senator Robert J. Bulkley of Ohio because Bulkley had voted against the Patman soldiers’ bonus bill: “If the senior senator from Ohio does not see fit to alter his judgment then Senator Bulkley’s political career ends here tonight. Who in this audience are willing to take him out?” “There were cries of ‘All of us’” from the audience, Vance wrote. Coughlin also criticized the Roosevelt administration’s opposition to the bonus bill:

The New Deal administration will commit suicide if, persisting in such policies, it follows through tomorrow or the next day or next week with a veto of the Patman soldiers’ bonus. No third or fourth party will be necessary. An undertaker will be necessary.

Vance detailed Coughlin’s denial that the NUSJ was a third political party. “The National Union is no more a political party than is the American Association of Bankers – the same association which has not only endeavored but has succeeded in controlling legislation,” Coughlin asserted. Bankers were not the only targets of the priest; Vance related that Coughlin “repeatedly attacked the newspapers, occasionally directing his remarks at the press tables, and praised the radio and telegraph as means for replacing the orator on a parity with the editor.” Coughlin implied that the press was reluctant to share its monopoly on influencing the public:

During the long period of time when public opinion was molded chiefly by the public press it was customary for the newspapers of this nation to support the passage of certain laws, the election of certain candidates, and the support of certain political parties. That’s been the history of newspapers. No one accused the newspapers of being a new political party because of these activities. Therefore, let not certain sensational newspapers stultify themselves by maligning the National Union as a new political party when the National Union is doing

nothing more than the newspapers have done but is simply doing it free from the domination of advertisers.¹³⁷

In addition to Vance's article, the *Plain Dealer* of May 9 reprinted the complete text of Coughlin's speech (which took up almost three pages) and printed two photos of the priest. One photo showed Coughlin being interviewed by reporters in his suite at the Hotel Statler; the other, showing Coughlin delivering his speech, was captioned, "Father Charles E. Coughlin as he addressed approximately 30,000 persons in Cleveland Auditorium last night. This was the largest 'political crowd' ever gathered at a single meeting in Cleveland." A small article on page 9 the same day quoted Senator Bulkley's response to Coughlin's attack: "If Father Coughlin or anybody else thinks I am going to be intimidated he is badly mistaken."¹³⁸

The *Cleveland Press* of May 9, 1935, printed two bylined articles and the complete text of Coughlin's speech. Richard L. Maher, the paper's politics editor, used vividly descriptive language throughout, beginning "Senator Robert J. Bulkley of Cleveland was marked for political extermination today by the Rev. Fr. Charles E. Coughlin." Maher called Coughlin "the outspoken priest who glues the nation's ears to its radios each Sunday" and said that the audience in Public Hall was "the greatest personal audience of [Coughlin's] career":

Thousands of men and women sat for hours on hard chairs in the basement exhibition halls, hearing the priest's talk by loud speaker arrangement and getting a fleeting view of him as he made personal appearances in all the halls....Amid boos – boos for Senator Bulkley – that grew in volume as he encouraged them with a smiling pause, he called for a political death warrant for Mr. Bulkley, Ohio's senior senator....As the crowd cheered him and booed the name of the Cleveland Democrat in the Upper House, Father Coughlin cried out: "Who here in this audience are willing to take him out?" Shouts of approval greeted his question and he went on: "That's his death warrant! Bury him!"

Maher also described Coughlin's activities the morning after the speech: sleeping late, breakfasting with friends in his hotel suite at 11 a.m., and granting a brief interview, "which he interrupted again and again to utter praise of Cleveland and its reception of him":

I never have received such cordial treatment anywhere as I did last night....The gentlemanliness of that crowd was something to comment about....The famous New York City Police Department cannot surpass that of Cleveland....The ushers did a great job; they were the boys behind the scenes....Cleveland is the "tops."¹³⁹ The other article in the May 9 *Press*, written by Ben Williamson, painted an

extremely flattering portrait of Coughlin, right from its opening:

The Rev. Fr. Charles E. Coughlin can take it as well as dish it out. The handsome priest from Royal Oak spoke for 85 minutes last night before 24,508 persons who paid to hear him in Public Hall and within the range of some 15,000 more who chose E. 6th street and its free space. Those 85 minutes were intensely full of action. The radio priest was in movement nearly every second of those minutes. That many minutes of straight speaking is a task even for an accomplished orator. Accompany them with the force of gesture that Father Coughlin gives his speech and you've got quite a tiring job on your hands.

Williamson extolled the priest's "grace of movement" as he stepped to the stage to speak, then described Coughlin as if he were an athlete: "A handsome, stocky fellow, broad shoulders tapering to narrow waist and straight, somewhat heavy legs." The reporter portrayed Coughlin as if he were a boxer:

He started slowly, leading up to a first climax. He made no gestures. He stood quite erect, legs slightly apart. His only movement was an occasional lifting of the paper from which he read. But now he was getting into things that made the crowd roar again. Now he was doubling a good-sized fist and shaking it in emphasis of his syllables. That was his chief gesture – and he did not confine it. He faced west, his audience to south and north. He shared his gestures. First the left hand, now the right. Now and then he changed the paper from right to left hand to leave the other free for a gesture. I had the impression he was spacing his gestures equally, just as he was controlling the tempo of his speech and the pitch of that great voice.

Staying in the realm of sports, Williamson abandoned boxing for baseball:

[Coughlin] uses all the nuances, the hesitations, the emphases. Like a good pitcher, he has a grand change of pace. Like all good exhorters and all good pitchers, he likes the roar of the crowd.

Williamson continued with the Coughlin-as-athlete theme when he described the priest outrunning the five Cleveland police detectives who were guarding him as he hastened to greet the audience:

“We’ll have to hurry,” said Father Coughlin and forged ahead of his guards. He half ran into the surging crowd and pushed his way to a platform. His back must have been pounded a hundred times, his sleeves plucked by scores of eager hands. But Father Coughlin wasn’t breathing faster than normally when he got to the platform. His police escort came puffing up. A few words and Father Coughlin was off to a wing of the exhibition hall, again leaving his interference behind. Capt. Potts stayed along the first 100 feet or so, but gave up when the crowd got thick. The gray-garbed priest, smiling and pushing, beat Capt. Potts to the platform by at least a minute.¹⁴⁰

The *Catholic Universe Bulletin* of May 10, 1935, included a front-page article headlined “Radio Priest Denies Union Is in Politics.” The article was more restrained and shorter than were the two *Cleveland Press* pieces. It began by relating how Father Coughlin, “probably the most-talked-of man in the United States” and “America’s foremost radio orator,” arrived by the Detroit boat at the East 9th Street pier on the morning of May 8. The priest celebrated Mass at St. John’s Cathedral, visited briefly at the Cathedral rectory, “then plunged into a busy day without a let-up until his address in the evening.” Remarking on the large crowd assembled in Public Hall for Coughlin’s speech, the article described the priest as “the unseen guest in their homes on many a Sunday afternoon.” When Coughlin “came upon the stage, becoming a visual reality, they sprang to their feet and burst into a prolonged cheer”; during his speech, “the Royal Oak priest was frequently interrupted by cheers and by boos for those he designed as enemies of the National Union for Social Justice.”¹⁴¹

Coughlin “stated emphatically that he is not in politics,” continued the article. It quoted Coughlin’s assertion that the NUSJ intended “to correct a situation in which the American people find themselves divided into two great classes,” one that controlled wealth and government and the other “with which you people are for the most part identified”:

Victimized by propaganda, you enter into quarrels and disputes among yourselves, failing to realize the necessity not only of preserving democracy but of forming your ranks in a solid phalanx to oppose the well established but numerically small group who have mastered you....It is your right, it is your duty, to reassemble your ranks, under our democratic form of government, and struggle morally and constitutionally to destroy an immoral control of credit and an immoral concentration of wealth which have multiplied poverty in the midst of plenty.¹⁴²

Both the *Cleveland Press* and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* published editorials commenting on Coughlin’s May 8 speech. The *Press* remarked that the priest “demonstrated in his address here last night that he is at the height of his self-confidence” but cautioned that for the NUSJ to continue, “its sponsor will discover that to maintain any co-operative effort successfully there must be a greater tolerance of divergent views in particular matters if any kind of cohesion is to be maintained in support of a general program.”¹⁴³ Calling attention to Coughlin enforcing “within the ranks of the national union and even upon public men outside it the most rigid obedience to every single dogma in his political creed,” the editorial noted the priest’s contradictory behavior: although he urged his supporters to revive “truly democratic processes in our Government,” the NUSJ was “solely the creation of one man, Father Coughlin himself.” The editorial ended with a warning:

One can hardly avoid feeling that the real import of his plea for “solidarity” among his followers is in actual effect and intention a plea for unquestioning obedience to his leadership. Many of his auditors are quite ready to abdicate in his

favor the right of private judgment in political affairs. If his leadership becomes dangerous to the country, it will be the fault not of Father Coughlin but of those citizens who voluntarily surrender the habit of private judgment – a habit and right which should not be yielded, as Father Coughlin says, in favor of any congressman or senator, or even of any president – and, we should like to add, not even in favor of the most eloquent of orators.¹⁴⁴

The editorial in the *Plain Dealer* also urged Coughlin to be more tolerant of those who disagreed with him: “His zeal for justice, however admirable as it is, does not excuse the assumption that those who do not agree with details of his program must perforce reject its purposes.” The remainder of the editorial admonished Coughlin for his attacks against the Roosevelt administration, declaring that “the federal government has done more under the present regime to attain the goals set up by the priest’s growing organization than any previous administration in the country’s whole history....As a practical friend of the underprivileged we rate Franklin D. Roosevelt above Rev. Charles E. Coughlin.” The editorial agreed that the soldiers’ bonus bill should be vetoed (“We challenge the assumption that this issue is the test of any man’s loyalty to social justice”) and concluded with further praise of the president:

It is Father Coughlin’s misfortune that he does not recognize in the country’s leader at Washington one as devoted as himself to the proper aims of liberalism, one who has done more than any of his predecessors to bring to the common man a fairer share of earth’s blessings and who, toiling at the most strenuous official job in the world, is turning dreams into realities, hopes into achievements. The country entrusted this critical job to Franklin D. Roosevelt. It has every reason to feel the trust was well placed.¹⁴⁵

Coughlin returned to Cleveland one year later to campaign for Congressional candidates who had been endorsed by the National Union for Social Justice. Once again, Coughlin’s speech earned a page one story in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, which described how a crowd of 25,000 in Cleveland Municipal Stadium heard the priest rail

against “so-called representatives of the people [who] betrayed their constituents and became representatives of the plutocrats.” The article quoted Coughlin:

It has become a government of the plutocrats, by the plutocrats and for the plutocrats. And I come today to ask if in your apathy you will sit idly by and let the manmade depression make paupers of the children of God....Just last week Mr. Edgar Hoover designated as America’s public enemy No. 1 the corrupt politician, the misrepresentative of the people. In a broader sense we should describe the leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties of America – the men who write their policies – as the greatest menaces to our Constitution, to our liberties and to our prosperity in all this land.¹⁴⁶

Although Coughlin also criticized the capitalists of the time, politicians received the full force of his oratorical fury: “Perhaps it is intemperate on my part or on yours to castigate the Kuhn-Loebs, the United States Steel or General Motors. They are not one-tenth as much to blame as those Judas Iscariot politicians who sell you out for 30 pieces of silver.” He exhorted the crowd to abandon the “old road of apathy” and turn to the “militant” road of support for the NUSJ-endorsed candidates. As he named those candidates, Coughlin heaped lavish praise on Representative Martin L. Sweeney:

Finally, we come to the Twentieth District, the one in which this stadium is located, the home of the National Union’s champion defender and spokesman in the Congress of the United States, gallant, brave Martin L. Sweeney, who must be returned to Congress by an overwhelming victory so that he can lead our battles in the years to come on the floor of the House. Congressman Sweeney is a candidate on the Democratic ticket and every Democrat in the district who believes in the sixteen principles of Social Justice should vote for their best exemplification in public life today – my trusted friend, Martin L. Sweeney, the man who introduced the bill to give America back to the Americans.¹⁴⁷

The national convention of the Townsend Old-Age Revolving Pension Society was the first of two high-profile political events held in Cleveland in the summer of 1936. The Townsend convention met in mid-July and featured Coughlin, Dr. Francis E. Townsend, and the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith, who had assumed the leadership of Huey Long’s Share Our Wealth Society. Cleveland newspapers provided extensive

coverage. The July 17 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* printed two convention stories on page one: a summary of the previous day's events and a feature story written by O. M. Walton. Headlined "Exchanges 'Jabs' with Radio Priest – Rev. G. L. K. Smith Tries Out Coughlin's Ribs with Friendly Punch," Walton's piece described Coughlin, Smith, and Townsend arm-in-arm, posing for photographers: "The two clergymen, both fine physical specimens, jovially tested each other's ribs in an exchange of friendly punches. Dr. Townsend, more elderly and frail, absorbed his punishment in spirited back-slapping."¹⁴⁸

Walton reported on Coughlin's speech of the previous day, in which he called President Roosevelt a "liar" and "a great betrayer" and referred to the president as "Franklin Double-Crossing Roosevelt." Walton described the scene in Public Hall:

Father Coughlin's entry from the rear of the hall was a dramatic masterpiece. The big audience stood and cheered him during the procession to the stage....The radio priest really became in earnest after denouncing the international bankers, the WPA, bureaucrats and national debts. He peeled off both his coat and his clerical collar. A few boos greeted his early sallies, but these were stilled by the announcement of Permanent Chairman Frank A. Arbuckle that "booing has no place in this convention."...Father Coughlin had a different cue, but used the same method as Rev. Mr. Smith to elicit a response from the assembly. After his biting attacks he would ask, "Is that democracy?" The "noes" seemed to be unanimous.¹⁴⁹

An editorial in the *Plain Dealer* observed, "On Wednesday the trend of sentiment among delegates was away from the idea of uniting with any third party until Coughlin addressed the convention." It continued:

Came then the radio priest from Detroit, himself organizer of the National Union for Social Justice, and chief inspiration behind the Union party of William Lemke. In a bitter attack on the president, which quite exceeded in abuse the proper restraints of public speech, he brought the delegates to their feet with new enthusiasm for the cause they represent. Free speech is a cherished possession under a democracy. No one would curtail its exercise. But when a political opponent, to whom hundreds of thousands listen, calls the president of the United States a "great liar and a great betrayer" – this choice of 22,000,000 voters for

chief executive of the republic, “Franklin Double-Crossing Roosevelt” – he turns freedom into license.

The editorial noted “the practical certainty that if the Townsend-Coughlin-Smith adherents deliver to Candidate Lemke even a major fraction of their self-estimated strength, it will mean the defeat of Mr. Roosevelt and the election of Gov. Landon.” It then posed the question of who “the Townsendites, the Coughlinites and the remnants of the Huey Long forces” preferred for president, concluding:

If the Townsendites-Coughlinites want social security and a continuation of present efforts to bring the “more abundant life” to more and more people their natural, logical choice is President Roosevelt. That this is the sober opinion of hundreds of these delegate-guests in Cleveland is clearly indicated. The fiery, effective oratory of an experienced public speaker may sell a majority of the convention the idea of a more militant program. A second thought is likely to support the saner, if less emotional, course of action.¹⁵⁰

The principal players who had visited Cleveland for the Townsend Convention returned in August for the first annual convention of the National Union for Social Justice. The NUSJ was entirely Coughlin’s organization, and the Radio Priest expected to take center stage despite the presence of Rev. Gerald L. K. Smith and Dr. Francis E. Townsend. The day before the convention opened, Richard L. Maher of the *Cleveland Press* reported that Coughlin had arrived in the city and “settled differences between local N.U.S.J. leaders over the expected appearance of Dr. Townsend and Rev. Smith upon the National Union platform. He effected a compromise whereby the two Townsend leaders will be permitted to speak Saturday afternoon after business sessions of the convention have ended.”¹⁵¹ Maher quoted Coughlin’s assertion that the NUSJ would enter into no coalition with any other organization: “The National Union is going to retain its own identity. If it doesn’t, I’ll step out of the National Union. By separate identities, I mean that we will not amalgamate with any other organization; we will adopt

no political party as our godchild.” Maher noted that Coughlin softened a statement he had made the last time he was in Cleveland:

When he spoke before the Townsend convention a month ago, Father Coughlin asserted that no National Union congressional candidate would be permitted to campaign for President Roosevelt. Today he explained that he did not mean to be so exacting with candidates. “We do not expect any candidate on the Democratic ticket to come out against President Roosevelt,” he said. “Nor do we expect the Republicans to come out against Gov. Landon. Nor do we expect them to come out for Mr. Lemke. But we will insist that they subscribe to the 16 points in our program.”¹⁵²

Maher also reported that Coughlin had backed out of a national speaking tour with Townsend and Smith on behalf of Lemke’s presidential campaign. The joint effort had been proposed at the Townsend convention; however, when he returned to Detroit after the convention, Coughlin observed that the schedule his staff had arranged for him precluded his participation in the tour. “There seems to be some feeling that the National Union-Townsend-Share the Wealth hookup is not so pleasing to the priest now as it appeared a month ago during the Townsend convention,” Maher observed.¹⁵³

Articles by reporters John W. Vance and Josephine Robertson in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* of August 15 provided colorful descriptions of the response Coughlin received from his stalwart supporters. Vance’s piece – headlined “Coughlinites ‘See Voice,’ Then Cheer; 10,000 Hail Leader Who Visions Brave New World Built on His Precepts” – set the stage:

A chunky man in a black suit and a clerical collar walked out and faced the sweating delegates. The light glinted briefly on his frameless spectacle [*sic*], and the 10,000 looked at him a second before their welcoming shout went up. Then they tore the roof off with their noise, for this was why they had come. This was Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, the new Lincoln of their dispensation. For many of the delegates, no doubt, it was a visualization of an hitherto unseen ideal, a man whom they had known only as a voice emerging from a wooden cabinet to damn the men who now control money and credit and to promise a brave new world if his specifics were applied.

Vance described the spontaneous parade that then erupted, lasting “for five minutes, for ten, for fifteen and a little more before the voice of the radio priest – one of the two most famous voices in America – could be heard.” Vance called the demonstration the emotional high spot of the opening day of the NUSJ convention, adding, “It was one of the few high spots, for the convention has not so far produced the clash of greeds [*sic*] and personalities which kept the two previous big political gatherings in this city in constant ferment.”¹⁵⁴

Vance’s article made it clear that Coughlin was the big draw. The reporter remarked on “the enormous photograph of Father Coughlin, framed by bunting, which hung in midstage.” He made wry comments about the behavior of the delegates:

The things these delegates will applaud, every time they are mentioned, gradually began to emerge. First of all, of course, is the name of Father Coughlin, or any indirect reference to him, such as “great tribune of the people,” “the searchlight of his great intellect.” Second is any reference to the power of Congress “to coin money and regulate the value thereof,” a phrase which has been quoted so often by the radio priest that the words come almost automatically to the lips of any of his speakers. Third is mention of Father Coughlin’s “sixteen principles of social justice.” The delegates, however, are more selective in their applause than were the Townsendites, who would cheer anybody (except Norman Thomas) on any subject.¹⁵⁵

“Women Strong in Coughlin’s Ranks; Seek Better Soup” was the headline of Josephine Robertson’s article, which aimed to give the female perspective on the convention. Observing that women formed at least forty percent of those attending the convention, Robertson commented:

Probably never before was there so large a feminine percentage at a national political convention. The women said they were making politics their business in order to get better shoes for their families and a better grade of soup in the pot. They were mostly housewives neither very young nor very old. They were mothers of families, not really interested in politics per se, who had been

convinced by Father Charles E. Coughlin that if they ever hoped for anything but “want in the midst of plenty” they would have to become politically-minded.¹⁵⁶

Robertson quoted Mrs. Charles E. Lynch of Boston: “Father Coughlin has educated women politically. They have learned that they live in a congressional district and which one. They know who represents them and what government is all about.” Mrs. Lynch and her Massachusetts colleagues wore feather headbands, Robertson wrote; Boston school teacher Miss Mary S. Kelleher explained:

We represent a second Boston tea party. You remember the Bostonians dressed up like Indians when they threw that high-priced British tea overboard. Well, we don’t like the high-priced tea we’re getting from Washington, and we don’t like taxation without representation, so we’re going to throw it overboard. The feathers stand for peace, however. That means we will use peaceful methods, not bullets but ballots.^{157*}

Robertson singled out Miss Theodora Schenkl of Illinois as “probably the largest feminine delegate” (“six feet four and a half inches tall...weighing 245 pounds”). “The smallest young lady was Mary Louise Cole, 5, daughter of Mrs. J. J. Cole of Clawson, Mich., who applauded the speakers from her mother’s lap,” the reporter observed. She added, “The women attending the convention have no national organization of their own or auxiliary organization. There was no one to officially represent them on the platform. The nine women there were the nine secretaries of Father Coughlin.”¹⁵⁸

The editorial page of the August 15 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* commented on the NUSJ convention, remarking that “the November election may be determined by forces set in motion in Cleveland this weekend.” The editorial appeared to take Coughlin’s influence seriously:

*The “bullets/ballots” reference surfaced a number of times. In his speech at the Townsend Convention a month earlier, Coughlin had exhorted his supporters to employ “the agency of ballots and not bullets.” By late September, Coughlin would contradict himself by advocating “the use of bullets...when the ballot is useless.”

There is little doubt that the NUSJ will put all it has of enthusiasm and evangelical enterprise into the effort to elect Lemke, knowing the probability of his success is very slight but hoping he will be able to show strength enough to defeat the president. Father Coughlin himself thinks Lemke will carry at least nine states. A large percentage of the Lemke strength, be it large or small, will be deducted from that of Mr. Roosevelt.¹⁵⁹

Pointing out that the philosophy of Coughlin's supporters was closer to that of Roosevelt than of Landon ("whether the tenets of the NUSJ be called radical or merely liberal, it is Mr. Roosevelt rather than Gov. Landon who looks in their direction"), the editorial asked why Coughlin's followers would choose a route that diverged from accomplishing their own objectives:

[O]ne would suppose that the Coughlin-Townsend-Huey Longites would prefer the re-election of Mr. Roosevelt to the election of Gov. Landon; that they would abstain from promoting a presidential candidacy which can thrive only in the degree it destroys Mr. Roosevelt's chances for a second term. It is a fair question whether, as the campaign advances, this view of the matter will not come more and more to be accepted by the present adherents of William Lemke. No one, we think, believes the Union party ticket can be elected. A vote for Mr. Lemke is not so much a vote for Mr. Lemke as it will be a vote for Gov. Landon and against President Roosevelt.¹⁶⁰

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* of August 17, 1936, devoted much of its front page to the closing events of the NUSJ convention the day before. "Coughlin Ill, is Ordered to Rest; Stricken in Middle of Stadium Talk" blared the banner headline. Reporter J. C. Daschbach's article led with a quote from the Radio Priest:

"I have been ill all night and am not able to proceed any further." With ten minutes of his radio time remaining and a bewildered audience of 40,000 looking on, Rev. Charles E. Coughlin uttered those words and abruptly ended his speech in Cleveland Stadium at the closing rally of the first national convention of his National Union for Social Justice yesterday afternoon. The radio priest was taken to his suite at the Hotel Hollenden. Dr. George P. O'Malley, police surgeon, was summoned. Following an examination Dr. O'Malley said Father Coughlin was suffering from exhaustion and nervous indigestion brought on by strenuous activity in the three days of the convention and the hot sun that beat down on the stadium.¹⁶¹

After Coughlin stopped speaking, Daschbach reported, he “faltered and his knees sagged when he reached the platform level,” where two police officers assisted the priest to a waiting automobile.

In addition to prominent photos of Coughlin, William Lemke, and Thomas C. O’Brien, page one also carried John W. Vance’s article headlined “Followers Bow in Prayer for Health of Coughlin.” Vance described the reaction of the “astounded, apprehensive crowd” who only a short while before had been “whipped...into a state of high emotional tension, in which it shouted answers to [Coughlin’s] questions like an enormous Bible class at its catechism.” Vance noted that the audience had earlier

enjoyed itself booing the names of President Roosevelt, Gov. Alf M. Landon of Kansas and William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, when they were mentioned by Lemke. The super-special shriek of the day, as usual, was the one which greeted Father Coughlin when his car drove into the field at 3:23 p.m., a yell which mounted in volume as the priest climbed to the speakers’ stand and reached its peak when he ascended another short flight of steps to the speaking rostrum, flanked by ten microphones.¹⁶²

The *Cleveland Press* of the same day gave considerably less attention to Coughlin’s speech and collapse. Page one pictured two of the Dionne quintuplets rather than any of the NUSJ speakers. Coughlin was relegated to page two, where a story by Richard L. Maher reported that the priest had returned to Detroit following his collapse the day before. Maher’s description of Coughlin’s illness was more colorful than that of Daschbach; according to Maher, “Five minutes short of the conclusion of his speech, he spun around, sighed ‘I’m sick!’ and stumbled off the rostrum into the arms of Detective Sergeant Thomas Murphy.”¹⁶³ Maher also noted that Coughlin had been made the NUSJ’s president “with dictatorial powers over the selection of all other officers” the day before the convention closed.

Both the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Cleveland Press* referred to the NUSJ convention on their editorial pages on August 17, the day after the convention ended. A short editorial in the *Press* highlighted Cleveland's prominence in hosting well-known political figures but made no specific comments about the NUSJ:

There is no American community that will have had a more thorough political education than Cleveland before election day on Nov. 3. The way this city votes should be interesting to all students of political psychology, for every candidate and theory with a substantial following has been presented to the people of this city by Number One advocates. Socialists, Republicans, Townsendites, and Coughlinites have met here in convention. President Roosevelt has been here in person. Candidate Lemke, Candidate Thomas, Father Coughlin, Dr. Townsend, and the Rev. Gerald L. K. Smith have been here twice during the summer.¹⁶⁴

The editorial in the *Plain Dealer* cast a more critical eye on the NUSJ events as it sought “an intelligent appraisal of the effect of the NUSJ effort upon the current political picture.” (PD August 17, 1936) It acknowledged that the 8,000 delegates who attended the convention constituted an important group that was loyal to Coughlin. The editorial continued its musings:

Most of these 8,000 are local leaders. How effective is their leadership? Upon the answer to this question depends the ability of the Lemke party to exert an important, perhaps a dominating, influence upon the outcome of the presidential election. No one will take very seriously the claims that Lemke can carry from nine to thirteen states. Seasoned political observers do not think he can win any. But that does not mean that Lemke might not swing the election – to Landon....The G.O.P. Old Guard may abhor every item of the Lemke-Coughlin social and economic philosophy, but it hails with delight the prospect that it may serve its ends through the followers of the Michigan priest and the Dakota representative.¹⁶⁵

The editorial pointed to the paradox confronting Lemke's supporters: “The more votes they win, the more help they are giving to the enemies of liberalism now arrayed behind Gov. Landon.” It concluded that, although the NUSJ delegates had “booed with impartiality” both Roosevelt and Landon,

the delegates knew as they cheered denunciations of the president, that while he has not and will not go as far in liberalism or radicalism as they think the nation should be led, his social philosophy is much closer to theirs than that of Gov. Landon appears to be. They may shout their dissatisfaction with the president in terms as sharp as those used by avowed reactionaries, but they will also realize, if they indulge in sober second thought, that a vote for Lemke is almost surely a vote for Landon.¹⁶⁶

The *Catholic Universe Bulletin* of August 21 printed an article headlined “Father Coughlin Marshals His Beliefs and His Disbeliefs at N.U.S.J. Convention Here.” The piece quoted passages from Coughlin’s convention remarks (including “I do not believe in the gold standard any more than I believe in the pig standard”) but included no commentary or description of convention activities. After the summation of Coughlin’s statements, this note concluded the article: “Although it has been reported here that Father Coughlin would resume his radio series on Sept. 12, Morrie Condon of WGAR’s program department yesterday stated the series, so far as the station knew, would begin about Jan. 1. WGAR has been the Cleveland outlet for past talks.”¹⁶⁷

The political situation was very different by the time Coughlin returned to Cleveland in late September 1939. War had erupted in Europe, and the Radio Priest’s influence was eroding in the face of his strident anti-Semitism and favorable view of some aspects of fascism. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* of September 22, 1939, included a small article headlined “Expects Coughlin to Speak in Person” on page 7, stating “Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, the Royal Oak (Mich.) radio priest, will be here in person to address the peace rally in Public Hall next Thursday night at 8, William Miller, president of the West Cleveland Revere Club of Father Coughlin’s League for Social Justice, said last night.” Coughlin’s topic was to be “Peace and Neutrality.” The piece indicated that there was confusion about how Coughlin would participate in the rally: “Archbishop Joseph

Schrembs, bishop of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese, who will preside at the rally, said he understood Father Coughlin's talk would be transmitted here by telephone and amplified in Public Hall."¹⁶⁸

"Archbishop Won't Join Peace Rally; Coughlin Headquarters Here Says Plan is Unchanged" the *Plain Dealer* reported the following week:

Archbishop Joseph Schrembs will not attend the peace rally in Public Hall tonight despite announcements that he would serve as chairman and introduce Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, the crusading priest from Royal Oak, Mich. "I have nothing to do with the meeting and will not be there," Archbishop Schrembs said last night. Informed of this, the headquarters of the Christian Social Justice Clubs, sponsors of the rally, insisted there had been no change in the plans.¹⁶⁹

The article stated that "a capacity throng of about 16,000 is expected," and added that the Socialist Workers Party planned to hold a simultaneous counter rally, "anti-war and anti-Fascist," in Public Square.

The next day's *Plain Dealer* reportedly extensively on Coughlin's speech, including a front-page story (headlined "17,000 Hear Peace Plea by Coughlin"), a photo of the priest (at the microphone) on the Picture Page, and publication of the condensed text of Coughlin's talk. The rally audience, estimated at between 17,000 and 18,000, heard the priest deliver "an impassioned plea for the United States to keep itself free from any direct or indirect involvement in the European war." The article noted the absence of Bishop Schrembs: "Neither Archbishop Schrembs nor any others high in Catholic circles were seen on the stage or in the audience, although the audience cheered loudly when Father Coughlin spent several minutes telling how grateful he was to the archbishop and how it was 'my privilege to know him and to love him.'"¹⁷⁰

Before Coughlin began speaking, the article remarked, William E. Miller, chairman of the rally, "presented him a valise almost filled with coins and paper money

collected from the audience.” The article stated that three men were required to carry the valise, and that the money that remained after the rally expenses were deducted “would be used to defray part of the costs of the priest’s Sunday broadcasts.”

The *Plain Dealer* did not mention how long Coughlin spoke. Based on the size of the priest’s condensed text, which spread over more than three pages, it was a lengthy address. The priest harkened back to the Great War, describing the pain felt “about 22 years ago tonight” by “some mothers in Cleveland” who received telegrams notifying them that “their boys who had donned the soldiers’ uniforms” had been killed in action. The priest asserted that he was not a pacifist, but he spoke out strongly against any U.S. involvement in the war. He addressed “you younger boys and men in this audience” who did not remember the World War:

You’re not supposed to remember. You’re only supposed to suffer and die. You’re only supposed to believe in the fanciful dreams of those who promise they’ll keep us out of war. You’re only supposed to turn deaf ears to the veterans who have lived through the madness of Flanders Field. You’re only supposed to be emotionalized by catch phrases of “saving the world for democracy,” of “fighting a war to end wars.” You’re only supposed to be mesmerized by history as it is written and not by history as it is lived. For of such stuff as you, young man, is cannon fodder made.¹⁷¹

Coughlin evoked the name of the country’s first president in his plea that the United States not enter the war:

Which philosophy will you pursue for the immediate years to come? The philosophy of Jesus Christ and His peace combined with the philosophy of George Washington and his “no foreign entanglements” or philosophy of those who ostracize Christ from parliament and factory and school room and homes of this nation. Long enough we have been deceived by the one, permitting our hearts to be engrossed by war and by the affairs of war and permitting our minds to be filled with the purchased propaganda of false idols.¹⁷²

As a “parting word,” Coughlin said he saw “a faint possibility that by Christmas... cannon will cease to roar and chastened leaders will decide to sit around a conference

table”; his hope was based “upon the one substantial spiritual condition that our prayers will storm heaven with sufficient fervor of strength to bring down this blessing” and on the “one political hope that we Americans shall hold ourselves free from involvement in the European war despite all the ruses and tricks which might be employed to engage us in it.”¹⁷³

The *Cleveland Press* of the same day also reported on Coughlin’s speech, its headline emphasizing a quote that the *Plain Dealer* had included far down in its story: “Fr. Coughlin Sees Stalin Victory in 3-Year War.” Reporter Frank Stewart referred to the event as a “war protest meeting” rather than a peace rally. The *Press* article was shorter than the one that appeared in the *Plain Dealer*, but Stewart also remarked on the absence of the archbishop: “Archbishop Schrembs, who had withdrawn an acceptance to act as chairman when the meeting was first arranged, was not on the platform. Likewise, there were no prominent members of the clergy in the Cleveland diocese seen on the stage nor in the audience.” The article concluded with a dire prediction by Coughlin:

And if this war is prolonged over a period of some three years, all I can see for poor Europe is chaos and destruction. I not only prevision the razing of Paris and London and other metropolitan centers. I not only estimate the death of another 10 million boys whose young lives will have been wasted in vain. Worse than all that I see a victory for Joseph Stalin and his Communistic regime – a regime whose advance guard is already established in every city – in Cleveland, Detroit, New York, Philadelphia and in every city of Europe – even in the cities of the victors.¹⁷⁴

Coughlin’s personal appearances always received a great deal of press attention, but the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Cleveland Press*, and the *Catholic Universe Bulletin* reported on the Radio Priest even when he was not within Cleveland’s confines.

“Schrembs is for Coughlin as Reformer” proclaimed the headline of a front-page story in the *Plain Dealer* of August 6, 1936. The article, written by Sonia Tomara (“Special Cable

to the New York Herald Tribune and the Plain Dealer” was noted under the byline) and datelined “Rome, Aug. 5,” described a visit to the Vatican by Bishop Joseph Schrembs of Cleveland and Bishop Michael Gallagher of Detroit. Tomara wrote that both bishops denied that Coughlin had been disciplined by church authorities; they “emphasized that rather than violating any precepts or policies of the Vatican in his speeches, Father Coughlin had been following exactly the directions given by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical against Communism.” Tomara quoted Bishop Schrembs:

Father Coughlin wants some protection for the laboring classes and their families, and the same thing has been asked by the pope in his encyclical. Fascism has now given it to Italian workmen. If American capitalists were not so short-sighted they also would advance in order to save their country from Communism.¹⁷⁵

According to the article, Bishop Gallagher maintained that the Vatican approved of Coughlin’s speeches because it agreed with the priest that drastic social reforms were the only defense against Communism. Wrote Tomara, “The only ‘disciplining’ that his bishop had imposed upon the Detroit priest was advice to use more careful language, and no one except the bishop had authority to discipline him, Bishop Gallagher added.” The reporter noted that “Bishop Gallagher’s affirmations were strongly supported by Bishop Schrembs” and added that Bishop Gallagher “appeared extremely annoyed at persistent press reports that his object in coming to Rome was to discuss with the pope the activities of Father Coughlin.”¹⁷⁶

Less than a month later, a large headline in the *Cleveland Press* proclaimed “Vatican Hits Fr. Coughlin and His Bishop.” The article, from United Press, painted a very different picture than had Tomara’s. It reported that *L’Osservatore Romano*, the official Vatican newspaper, disapproved of Coughlin’s “outspokenness in his political addresses.” The article continued:

Osservatore denied a report attributed to the Most Rev. Michael J. Gallagher, bishop of Detroit, Father Coughlin's superior, saying that the Holy See fully approves the activities of Father Coughlin. "This does not correspond with the truth and Bishop Gallagher knows only too well what the Holy See told him in this regard," Osservatore said. "It is most evident that an orator who inveighs against persons representing the supreme social authorities, with the evident peril of upsetting among the crowd that respect which is due to authorities, sins against the elementary conventions. The unconventionality is so much greater and much more evident when the speaker is a priest."¹⁷⁷

The article stated that Coughlin had been highly critical of President Roosevelt throughout the late spring and summer of 1936 and noted that the priest's criticism "reached its peak...when he called President Roosevelt a 'liar,' a 'betrayed,' and a 'double-crosser' in a speech he made to delegates to the Townsend Old-Age Pension convention in Cleveland on July 16."

A short article in the *Catholic Universe Bulletin* of September 11, 1936 ("Father Coughlin Never Mentioned at Papal Audience, Says Bishop") dealt with remarks made by Bishop Gallagher when he returned to Detroit from Europe. "The question of Father Coughlin was never mentioned either officially nor unofficially in my talk with the Holy Father," the bishop was quoted as saying. Bishop Gallagher continued:

I had called Father Coughlin's attention to the impropriety of calling President Roosevelt a liar before I left for Europe and he apologized. The matter was never discussed with any Vatican officials unless I brought it up. I did not say that Rome had given positive approval to the activities of Father Coughlin. Erroneous press reports quoted me to that effect. The Holy Father is worried very much about the Spanish situation [referring to persecution of clergy during the Spanish Civil War] and the great menace of Communism. In comparison, the question of Father Coughlin is a trifle.¹⁷⁸

Less than one month later, the *Catholic Universe Bulletin* printed a much larger article which left no doubt that Coughlin was becoming a serious problem for the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. Headlined "Two Ohio Bishops Condemn Reported Appeal to Force Made by Father Coughlin," the article reprinted in their entirety the

statements issued by Archbishop John T. McNicholas of Cincinnati and Bishop Joseph Schrembs of Cleveland following Coughlin's incendiary remarks at a rally of the National Union for Social Justice in Cincinnati on September 25, 1936. Although both bishops affirmed Coughlin's right to free speech, they deplored the priest calling President Roosevelt "anti-God" and disapproved of Coughlin's advocacy of "bullets instead of ballots." Archbishop McNicholas was forceful:

[W]hen Father Coughlin says, within the limits of this diocese, that he advocates the use of bullets "when any upstart dictator in the United States succeeds in making a one-party government and when the ballot is useless," I must on moral grounds protest and condemn such a statement for the priests and people of this jurisdiction. God grant that our country shall never have an "upstart dictator," and that it shall never see the day when "the ballot is useless."¹⁷⁹

The statement of Bishop Schrembs acknowledged that Coughlin "is a zealous priest and a remarkable, eloquent man who for years has availed himself of the advantage of radio to bring the message of religion to millions of people." However, Bishop Schrembs continued,

...[I]t is to be regretted that in the heat of argument he is carried away at times by the strong emotionalism of the orator and at times has gone beyond the issues involved and used invectives against the President of the United States, who, after all, represents the supreme authority of law and order and is entitled to the respect of every American citizen. I do not feel these mistakes in judgment overbalance the great good Father Coughlin has done....Father Coughlin's reference to bullets and ballots was an unfortunate turn of phrase in view of the fact that we have not reached the dictatorship stage. Thank God we're still a democratic people, possessed of good common sense....Father Coughlin has done a very wonderful work, but his language in this instance was intemperate and unwise. Present conditions do not call for it.¹⁸⁰

Cleveland newspaper coverage of Coughlin in 1939 and beyond became increasingly critical. A January 16, 1939 article in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* quoted Coughlin asserting in his weekly broadcast that "to preserve democracy" the United States "must keep out of war." He warned that the country must stay clear of "foreign

entanglements” and “observe strict neutrality.” The article also quoted Coughlin’s criticism of the American League for Peace and Democracy as being a communist organization:

The Royal Oak (Mich.) priest charged that many “indifferentists” have been attracted to the ranks of the American League for Peace and Democracy. “These good members of the league do not know that the American League for Peace and Democracy is a misnomer,” he added. “They do not know that it were better called a ‘league for war and dictatorial Communism.’ This organization... shows its red hand when it piously opposes the advances of Fascism but utters not one word against Communism, the hater, the destroyer, the murderer of Christians.”¹⁸¹

Clevelander Berl A. Whitney, the director of educational research for the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, called Coughlin’s remarks about the American League for Peace and Democracy “untruthful and unreasonable.” Whitney stated that he presided at two sessions of the league’s national convention in Washington the previous week, and added, “I never have been and am not now a Communist except in the spirit of those Fascist-minded individuals who have contended that President Roosevelt, Chief Justice Hughes, Shirley Temple and that long-dead Elizabethan dramatist, Christopher Marlowe, are ‘dangerous radicals’ and fronts for the Communists.”¹⁸²

An indication that Coughlin was skating on very thin ice indeed came from an article in the *Catholic Universe Bulletin* of November 24, 1939, “Inaccuracies Are Charged; Catholic Paper Cites Fr. Coughlin Errors.” It reported that the *Michigan Catholic*, the official newspaper of the Detroit Archdiocese, had charged editorially in its issue of November 16 that “three distinct classes of errors were contained in the Nov. 13 radio discourses of the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin.” The article specified the classes of errors as “errors of fact concerning the issues at dispute in the Chrysler strike; interpolations and quotations out of context of the words of the late Pope Pius XI; and

errors of interpretation concerning the functions of the Wagner Labor Act, the National Labor Relations Board and the Department of Labor in the settlement of industrial disputes.”[†] The *Universe Bulletin* summarized in detail the nature of Coughlin’s errors, as described in the *Michigan Catholic*, ending with this statement:

The Michigan Catholic also declares that Father Coughlin is confused as to the power of the government to intervene in the Chrysler strike. “A conciliator,” the paper points out, “has no power to order a settlement.” Citing the fact that all ordinary means of settlement of the dispute are now being employed, the paper says that “evidently Father Coughlin refers to some extraordinary means.”¹⁸³

Just a few weeks later, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported on remarks made by Coughlin regarding “good Jews and bad Jews” in a radio broadcast. “The Jews of America cannot afford to be identified with Communism.... Communism must be stamped out or a defense mechanism will be built up here in the United States like Naziism in Germany,” Coughlin was quoted as saying. The newspaper article reported that Coughlin read “from what he said was a report by the National Jewish Council in the B’nai Brith, national Jewish monthly, for June, 1938, which said: ‘In Bridgeport and Cleveland, the councils persuaded schools to stop Easter and Christmas practices which had proved embarrassing for Jewish children.’” Coughlin remarked:

[†] The United Auto Workers (UAW) began slowdown strikes in select departments of Dodge Main and other Chrysler plants around August 23, 1939. Unable to maintain production, Chrysler closed the Dodge Main plant on chosen October 11; a week later, the UAW launched a conventional strike. The previous month, workers at eleven of fourteen of Chrysler’s plants had the UAW-CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) as their bargaining agent. The strike lasted six weeks, ending on November 29. (See Charles K. Hyde, *Riding the Roller Coaster: A History of the Chrysler Corporation* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003, 117-119].) In his radio broadcast of November 12, 1939, Coughlin blamed the CIO for the strike, saying it was striking not for higher wages or to establish the principle of unionism, but to demand “an *equal* control of production standards and a *total* control of discipline over all workmen in the Chrysler Corporation.” Coughlin called for government action to end an “insufferable and useless strike,” maintaining that Pope Pius XI had stated, “If the contending parties cannot come to an agreement, public authority intervenes,” and that only the state can conclude labor contracts and labor agreements. (See Charles E. Coughlin, “The Chrysler-C.I.O. Industrial Strike” [Royal Oak, MI: broadcast of November 12, 1939, http://research.udmercy.edu/digital_collections/coughlin_cou/broadcast_coubro/coubro_19391211_chrys.)]

I do not wish to infer that Jews are totally responsible for the elimination of Christ from our schools and banishing religion from our education. Lenin said, "Give me a child for three years and I will hand you back a Communist." If God is eliminated from our schools, then those schools will graduate a godless generation....I hold no animosity toward the Jews. I distinguish between good Jews and bad Jews. Communistic Jews have been responsible in great part for the persecutions visited upon Jews everywhere."¹⁸⁴

Coughlin "repeated his statement that the number of Jews in high positions in Russia is out of proportion with the entire population," the article added. It also reported, "A member of the Jewish Community Council of Cleveland said last night that there was no attempt by the council to impose its will on the schools." The member, who "did not wish to be quoted personally, saying if any statement were made in reply to Father Coughlin it should come officially from the council," explained:

We merely asked the principals of schools to cooperate with us in order to make the religious phase of Christmas and Easter as celebrated in the schools more agreeable to children of other religions during these seasons. Some time ago a committee headed by Rabbi A. H. Silver took the matter up with Supt. Charles H. Lake of Cleveland and the heads of the school systems of some of the smaller municipalities."¹⁸⁵

By August of 1940, the *Cleveland Press* had become markedly critical of Coughlin. The newspaper published a series of articles written by staff writer William Miller that discussed the "pro-Fascist leanings" of the Radio Priest. Miller did not mince words:

With each new victory of German arms, Charles E. Coughlin – the Royal Oak radio priest – has become more and more outspoken in his sympathies with Fascism....One does not need to read many issues of Social Justice to learn where Coughlin stands these days. He is frankly gratified at the defeat of France and looks forward with obvious pleasure to seeing England similarly overrun....Coughlin's methods are Hitler's methods. Coughlin's technique is Hitler's technique.¹⁸⁶

To refute accusations that criticism of Coughlin was criticism of the Catholic Church, Miller listed a number of prominent American Catholics, including the late George Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago, William Cardinal O'Connell of Boston, and former presidential candidate Alfred E. Smith (whom Miller called "perhaps the best-known Catholic layman in America"), who had spoken out against Coughlin. Miller concluded, "There need be no fear of offending Coughlin's co-religionists in discussing him – not as 'the Rev. Fr. Charles E. Coughlin,' Catholic priest, but as Charles E. Coughlin, an individual – an individual, moreover, who happens to enjoy apparently unlimited resources, who owns a magazine of national circulation and who has, and probably will again, broadcast his views on nation-wide hookups."¹⁸⁷

In addition to running Miller's anti-Coughlin series, the *Cleveland Press* also editorialized against Coughlin. The paper applauded Wendell Willkie for rejecting the support of Coughlin or of anyone else "who stands for any form of prejudice as to anybody's race or religion or who is in support of any foreign economic or political philosophy in this country." The editorial concluded:

Those who have heard and read the tirades of Father Coughlin will know what value to place on his prompt assertion that he is not "against any race." Father Coughlin has – shall we say – contradicted himself so often that his word on any subject is no longer impressive. He has said many improbable things – but none, we regret to say, more improbable than his remark yesterday that in the presidential campaign "maybe I'll remain silent." Silence, from Father Coughlin, is too great a boon for the country to hope for.¹⁸⁸

After the United States entered World War II, the *Cleveland Press* ramped up its already tough criticism of Coughlin. An editorial on March 14, 1942, leveled a series of accusations against the NUSJ publication *Social Justice* for publishing pro-Nazi, pro-Japan, and anti-Semitic statements. The editorial castigated Coughlin for

preaching pure and unadulterated Nazi propaganda despite the fact that he is a citizen of the United States. He could not be doing better for the cause of Joseph Goebbels if he were being paid a million dollars a year in Nazi gold. He has Goebbels' own diabolical cunning for twisting half-truths, for crying sanctimoniously that "Communism is the real enemy of civilization," for fanning the flames of hatred against the Jews as the scapegoat. Father Coughlin's doctrines, taken as a whole, do not give the impression that he wants America to win or that he really believes that Germany and Japan are enemies of this country.¹⁸⁹

Another *Cleveland Press* editorial scarcely a week later continued the newspaper's assault on the Radio Priest. "Father Coughlin and Victory" acknowledged that it, along with many other newspapers in America, had been critical of some phases of the war effort, including lagging production, delays in converting nondefense industries into defense industries, and Congress's failure to act as speedily as the public desired. *Social Justice* echoed some of these criticisms, said the editorial, but Coughlin did not stop there:

He never calls for "more tanks, more guns, more planes." He says an offensive against the Axis nations is Russia's idea and, if tried, will "produce defeat." He wants the people to war on the Government. He says the "battle of the Potomac," to rid Washington of "presidential bottle-necking," "bureaucratic sabotaging," and "Communist control" is the important battle. He says it is "impossible" for citizens to give "wholehearted" support to the war because of the Government's "mismanagement."¹⁹⁰

The editorial concluded boldly, "Any loyal American who reads a single issue of *Social Justice* must come to this conclusion: Father Coughlin does not want America to win this war."

When *Social Justice* was barred from the mails in spring 1942, the *Cleveland Press* cheered. However, despite conceding that Coughlin's publication, which the *Press* referred to as Coughlin's "Nazi propaganda sheet," would continue to circulate, the

newspaper did not agree with the efforts of a Cleveland councilman who had introduced a resolution to forbid the sale of *Social Justice* on the streets of Cleveland:

In our judgment, this question is better left to the federal authorities. Questions of tactics as well as questions of law and principle are involved in the handling of this case. If a sound legal basis can be found for prosecuting Father Coughlin and shutting up his publication entirely, it is most likely to be found under federal statutes rather than municipal ordinances. Certainly any action against this sheet ought to be taken under some general principle of law and not simply by a resolution aimed at a single object.

Although the *Press* declared that it did not wish that Cleveland's "traditions of free speech and civil liberty... should be converted into a special tolerance for treason," it advocated patience rather than imprudence:

In the expression of honest patriotic indignation against the Royal Oak Nazis, we should not like to see this city adopt arbitrary procedures which might endanger the legitimate rights of those who speak and write hereafter in this city. The Federal Government has Fr. Coughlin under consideration and it will doubtless proceed with further measures when it feels certain it has sound legal ground for doing so. Meanwhile, we do not believe the Council and mayor of Cleveland need to make haste more rapidly than the Department of Justice.¹⁹¹

The *Press* was prescient. Just a few weeks later, in early May 1942, the Radio Priest, submitting to Church authority, severed his ties to *Social Justice* and ceased all political activities.

As Coughlin withdrew from the public stage, Cleveland newspaper coverage of him abated. When rumors of Coughlin's retirement from the Shrine of the Little Flower surfaced in 1965, the *Cleveland Press*, in an editorial titled "A Voice from the Past," strolled down memory lane:

The name of Rev. Charles E. Coughlin means little to the present generation and understandably so. In the lean depression years of the 1930s, though, the voice of the radio priest of the Shrine of the Little Flower at Royal Oak, Mich. was listened to intently by millions looking for guidance. Father Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice was organized here at Public Hall. His personal

appearances in Cleveland always drew enthusiastic crowds. Cong. Martin L. Sweeney and attorney Sylvester McMahon, both now dead, were two of his most ardent supporters.

The editorial noted that it was a former Clevelander, Bishop Edward Mooney of Detroit, who “finally silenced the radio priest,” and stated that “the League for Human Rights here urgently called for his internment.” The *Press* concluded its remembrance with words that would have rankled the once-powerful orator:

Father Coughlin’s later years have passed quietly as a priest in the parish where he launched his unprecedented career. News of his forthcoming retirement caused hardly a ripple in the outside world.¹⁹²

PART III. BISHOP JOSEPH SCHREMBS AND FATHER CHARLES E. COUGHLIN – AN EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP

Bishop Joseph Schrembs was installed as bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland on September 8, 1921.¹⁹³ Later that decade he would become acquainted with Father Charles E. Coughlin. Their paths would cross many times throughout the 1930s, and their relationship, although apparently cordial, would become increasingly complicated.

At the time Schrembs became bishop, the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland included over 454,000 Catholics in seventeen counties. The majority of the diocese's members were primarily working-class immigrants from Europe with strong ties to their ethnic parishes, schools, organizations, and neighborhoods. Schrembs historian Martin F. Poluse describes them as "traditional Catholics taking pride in their ancestry, their families, and their own homespun religious convictions...they also needed the American Church to foster their religious education, give them a sense of direction, and provide them with leadership."¹⁹⁴

It is noteworthy that Schrembs and Coughlin shared some key interests. Schrembs was among the first to consider that radio might be useful to the Catholic Church as a means of evangelization and to communicate the church's positions on both individual and national issues.¹⁹⁵ As episcopal director of the National Council of Catholic Men, Schrembs was instrumental in beginning radio broadcasting of the Catholic Hour series. Schrembs himself was the guest speaker on the first program, which was broadcast on WEAJ in New York on March 2, 1930. Schrembs also was a frequent speaker on local radio stations in the Cleveland Diocese.¹⁹⁶

Schrembs shared Coughlin's interest in social justice and supported the rights of laborers to organize for the sake of collective bargaining. Like Coughlin, Schrembs was inspired by the discussion of social-justice issues in the papal encyclicals. Michael J. Hynes, who chronicled the history of the Diocese of Cleveland, writes that Schrembs sympathized with the workers during the 1937 steel strike. While condemning violence and vandalism, the bishop "considered it his privilege and duty to champion the cause of labor and to vindicate their right to a living wage and a sufficient competence for human existence."¹⁹⁷

Schrembs remained a strong supporter of social justice and welfare issues throughout his life. He was one of four bishops who administered the National Catholic War Council during World War I; this body later became the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), which promoted cooperation between clergy and laity, channeled information from the Conference to local dioceses, and stimulated the application of Catholic principles to education and to social, economic, and political affairs.¹⁹⁸

Schrembs and the administrative committee of the NCWC supported the Roosevelt administration, believing that its New Deal programs benefitted Catholics. They were also appreciative that Catholicism had achieved a level of political influence under Roosevelt, something that the American Church had not previously experienced.¹⁹⁹

Pope Pius XII conferred the title of archbishop upon Bishop Schrembs on March 25, 1939, the date of Schrembs' golden jubilee in the priesthood. Among those sending congratulations was President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who, according to Hynes, "recalled that the Archbishop was the last survivor of those who drew up the Catholic bishops'

program of social reconstruction which called for readjustments, social, economic, and political, in the period following the First World War.”²⁰⁰

The correspondence[†] reviewed for this paper spans a period of almost fourteen years and mirrors Coughlin’s early days in Royal Oak until his banishment from the airwaves. It reveals how the regard Schrembs had for Coughlin’s social-justice aims became eroded by Coughlin’s foray into bitterly partisan politics, anti-Semitism, and isolationism.

The earliest correspondence between Coughlin and Schrembs dates from April 5, 1926, when Coughlin sent a handwritten letter to the bishop of Cleveland:

Right Rev. Bishop, may I presume upon the friendship which we hold in common with Bishop Gallagher to ask you for a special favor. Before petitioning you may I introduce myself as the young priest for whom you so graciously preached at St. Leo Church, Detroit more than a year ago.²⁰¹

Coughlin explained that he had been recently appointed pastor of St. Therese of the Child Jesus by Bishop Michael Gallagher, who also had permitted Coughlin to “edit a magazine devoted to the Little Flower.” Coughlin solicited an article for the magazine (“Shower of Roses”) from Schrembs, whom Coughlin regarded as “excellently equipped to do ample justice to any Teresian information.” Coughlin added a postscript stating that “Shower of Roses” was going to press on May 1, 1926. As this was less than a month away, perhaps it is not surprising that Schrembs had his diocesan chancellor send this brief reply: “The Right Reverend Bishop directs me to say that he regrets exceedingly that he cannot grant

[†] The letters referenced here are preserved in the Archives of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland. Most of the correspondence was directed to and/or answered by Schrembs and give his name as the writer. In a few cases, letters were signed by the bishop’s secretary. Although only one of the letters identifies Monsignor Floyd L. Begin as Schrembs’ secretary, Begin served in that capacity throughout the period covered in this paper, so it is safe to assume that the letters signed only “secretary” were composed by Begin. A small number of letters were sent to and/or answered by auxiliary bishops of the diocese. Spelling, grammar, syntax, and capitalization have been preserved exactly as written in the correspondence included here.

your favor. He is simply overwhelmed with work at the present time. He is on his Spring Confirmation tour with the extra work this entails.”²⁰²

Coughlin began radio broadcasting six months later (October 1926). As the Radio Priest’s increasingly political statements began attracting attention, people began writing to Schrembs regarding Coughlin. Wm. J. H. Boetcker, of Erie, Pennsylvania, was one of them:

You may know of the effort now being made, to GAG that fearless priest, Father Coughlin, who broadcasts over Columbia System, Sundays at 7 p.m. Following his suggestion, and complying with his request, we sent letters, like attached, not only to respective stations, but to friends all over, asking them to do likewise. Does this letter meet with your approval? ²⁰³

Boetcker enclosed a copy of a letter to radio station WGR strongly supporting Coughlin:

The writer wishes to most emphatically URGE you to KEEP UP THAT GOLDEN HOUR of Father Coughlin....I have heard everyone of these so-called inflammatory Speeches – and I believe they should be read by ALL AMERICA. We NEED THE TRUTH – and how any man-Intellectual Executive can take the attitude to GAG a Priest of that Great Mother Church – the ONLY Church that stands as a United force against Radicalism and Socialism – that is more than I can fathom. I, personally, would DREAD the future – were it not for the R.C. Church – for SHE will be the real insurmountable WALL and BULLWARK against Radicalism, and so-called Bolshevism. If Rev. Coughlin is RIGHT – if he preaches and tells the TRUTH – why suppress him? Why try to GAG him? Only the thoughtless or the guilty, could object to have the TRUTH BEING KNOWN at critical times like these. If these GAGGERS should succeed – I predict it will start a wave of RESENTMENT against such SUPPRESSION OF TRUTH that – GOD only knows where it will and must end.²⁰⁴

Coughlin sent an effusive letter to Schrembs on October 13, 1931. He thanked Schrembs for his presence at the dedication of the Shrine of the Little Flower, where, writes Brinkley, Schrembs “praised Coughlin as a leader not only of religious but of secular thought.”²⁰⁵ Coughlin wrote flatteringly:

Once more may I express to you my sincere thanks for your graciousness in having honored us last Sunday. As usual, you conducted yourself before the microphone as only Bishop Schrembs can do. You heard Bishop Gallagher pay

glowing tribute to you in your presence. But in your absence he is even more fulsome in his praise and appreciation. We observed that the perspiration almost ruined your beautiful gold vestments because of the heat in the sanctuary. So I hope that you will accept the enclosed check; although small, it will help to replace some of your vestments.²⁰⁶

In Schrembs' reply, he describes the size of Coughlin's gift differently and mentions an different use for it:

My dear Father Coughlin: I have your kind letter together with generous enclosure. This part of it, I need not say, was quite unnecessary. What I did last Sunday was really a labor of love for Bishop Gallagher and a proof of my sincere esteem for yourself. It needed no compensation. However, since you have seen fit to send me your generous check, I shall use it for the relief of the poor of whom there are plenty knocking at my door.²⁰⁷

On April 1, 1933, Schrembs appeared to have interceded on behalf of a Cleveland newspaper reporter:

My dear Father Coughlin: MISS REGINE COURLANDER is the representative of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, which is really our best Cleveland newspaper. I hope you will find it possible to grant her an interview. I am sure she will do your [*sic*] justice.²⁰⁸

As Coughlin's radio sermons became more inflammatory, some Catholics who objected to the Radio Priest's statements began to contact Schrembs. Leon Lehmann, of Pleasant Plains, Illinois, expressed serious concerns:

I yesterday listened to the talk made from the "Shrine of the Little Flower" by Father Coughlin and am very sorry to say that I could in no way connect it with the R.C. church. I am a Roman Catholic and have formerly been a member of "The League of the Little Flower." I should, and am, very slow to in any way comment on the assertions of a Priest, but I cannot help but feel that the Dignity of the Catholic church is being greatly menaced. A few years ago when the Government was asking every person to invest in Liberty Bonds one was considered a Slacker not to invest, now Father Coughlin calls the holders of Gov. Bonds "Blood Suckers." He also says that the people who buy securities, underwritten as Gold Bonds (which any careful investor would have done) are "Rats." I have talked with several Catholics of late who are of the same opinion as I am. I am writing this strictly for information. Is the church in sympathy with these Sermons? ... Hoping the separation of church and State will be fostered and maintained I remain sincerely yours....²⁰⁹

Lehmann appears to have been a businessman; his letter was handwritten on stationery bearing the letterhead “John Lehmann’s Sons, General Merchandise; Groceries, Men’s Clothing, Shoes, Hardware, Paints, Farm Supplies.” Why Lehmann addressed his concerns to Schrembs and not to Bishop Gallagher, Coughlin’s superior, is puzzling. Lehmann might have appealed to Schrembs as a leader in the American Church. Also, Lehmann may have known of the cordial relationship between Schrembs and Coughlin and hoped that Schrembs might be able to influence Coughlin. If that was the case, Lehmann might have been disappointed by the response he received from Schrembs’ secretary:

The Most Reverend Bishop received your letter of November 20, and he directs me to say that Father Coughlin does not represent the Catholic Church in his public utterances. His Lordship regrets that he has been unable to follow Father Coughlin’s lectures, and therefore knows little about their content. Father has the approval of his own Bishop and is exercising his right as an American citizen....Father Coughlin has so many friends and admirers that it is hardly possible that he is overstepping his rights as an American citizen.²¹⁰

Although Coughlin’s anti-Semitism became overt in the latter years of the 1930s, there was evidence of it in the earlier years of the decade.²¹¹ It is clear that prominent members of Cleveland’s Jewish community were troubled by Coughlin’s statements. Nathan Loeser, a partner in the Cleveland law firm Mooney, Hahn, Loeser & Keough, raised the issue in 1934 in a letter he wrote to Auxiliary Bishop James A. McFadden:

I am enclosing a copy of the Temple Bulletin of May 13th, containing an article on Father Coughlin, written by Rabbi Silver, and first printed in the Jewish Daily Bulletin. I would appreciate it if, after reading it, you would show it to Bishop Schrembs; and at your convenience, when I see you, I would like to discuss the subject with you.²¹²

The article Loeser referred to was written by Abba Hillel Silver, rabbi of Temple Tifereth Israel in Cleveland and one of America's most prominent Jewish leaders. Rabbi Silver questioned why Coughlin condoned anti-Semitism:

Coughlin must surely know that the Jewish plan for world dominion through domination of all countries by international high finance is the kingpin argument in Nazi Jew-baiting. Is that the reason why, to our best knowledge, he has not raised his voice once during the whole last year in protest of the horrors and cruelties of the Hitler regime? ²¹³

No reply to Loeser was included in the Schrembs file of Coughlin-related correspondence. It seems likely that McFadden would have referred Loeser's concerns to Schrembs, but, in the absence of evidence, one can only ponder possible scenarios for how the bishops responded.

Just as Schrembs was approached by people who opposed Coughlin, adherents of the Radio Priest addressed letters of zealous support for the Radio Priest to the bishop. A handwritten letter from Frank Ponchak championed Coughlin and the recently founded (November 1934) National Union for Social Justice:

As a Catholic citizen of Cleveland, Ohio, as a young man of 22 years of age, as the only supporter of a family of six for four years, I urge you in God's name, and plead with many more of our Cleveland Catholic citizens, for God's sake, to urge our Catholic priest and laymen to join in and support, The National Union for Social Justice. Our Catholic church, and our priests, have asked, time and time again to pray to God Almighty, to put an end to depression. God will not come down upon earth to do it. So He sent this man, the Rev. Charles Coughlin, an apostle of the church to teach our country men what the racketering, Capitalist & Politicians are doing. Why pray to God, when the Apostle of God & our own Catholic church, impeach and protest against the man God has sent....I have heard our own Catholic priest in Cleveland, protest and Complain that a priest has no right to interfere with Politic and Capitalist....Well, a Catholic priest has as much rights to preach justice and it's rights as much as it preaches truth and Justice about God and it's Church....When a Catholic sees and hears our own Catholic priest & Clergy men preach against and impeach a man, who millions of peoples know what he says is true, it turns them away from God and it's church. For in church they preach to be honest and just, and then stand by the men who have ruined this country, by unjust slavery, unjust wages, and starvation....So

Almighty God has put an end and sent His Apostol, who can enlighten the people, as a reward for their abundance of prayers....Now Our Catholic people Call upon our Bishops and Catholic priest to support & stand by the human right of the National Union for Social Justice. God wills' it, Why not his Apostels.²¹⁴

The reply that was sent to Ponchak on behalf of Schrembs by the bishop's secretary indicates that Schrembs was becoming wary of Coughlin and his activities:

The Most Reverend Bishop received your letter of December 11th, and directs me to reply that at no time has he in any way interfered with Father Coughlin's program of Social Justice – that you are at perfect liberty to join the National Union and get your friends to join....Some priests, and even Bishops, may have found fault with the organization not because of what it actually is, but because of what it may become. A body of organized men may easily be lead by a “political boss” and become a political party....You, who are so interested in this matter, should pray that the pure purpose for which the organization is established, may continue to guide it.²¹⁵

It is particularly noteworthy that Schrembs expressed reservations about the NUSJ so soon after its founding. One may surmise that the bishop was beginning to believe that Coughlin was heading in the wrong direction.

Even if Schrembs was becoming guarded about Coughlin, he did not interfere with the local appearances of the Radio Priest. Sam H. Deutsch, chairman of the Cuyahoga County Council of the American Legion, wrote to the bishop in early 1935:

For some time I have been making an effort to have Father Charles E. Coughlin come to Cleveland to address the members of The American Legion. Of course we would want your approval before proceeding further with our plans. I am, therefore, writing this letter beseeching your kindly approval.²¹⁶

An auxiliary bishop (not identified further) responded: “The coming of the Reverend Father Charles E. Coughlin to Cleveland to address the members of the American Legion will meet with the approval of Bishop Schrembs. He was unable to come to the office yesterday and therefore asked me to convey that message to you.”²¹⁷

As Coughlin became even more controversial, concerned laypeople continued to correspond with Schrembs about him. Theresa Scherer, who described herself as “one young lady of your Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, and a member of St. Timothy’s Parish,” wrote to the bishop in March 1935:

I love my Religion and therefore am coming to you with an appeal wondering if you as Bishop of Cleveland could do something toward stopping Father Coughlin from broadcasting his speeches against our Beloved President. Before it is too late to do something, we as loyal Catholics ought to back our President in times like these, one hundred percent, instead of raking him over the coals, as he has been doing. Should we have our houses covered with innocent blood of our fellowmen? We don’t want to be persecuted as other Catholics in Mexico, Spain & Russia, we want to be free to worship our God. Two years ago, Father Coughlin was for Mr. Roosevelt and The New Deal, now he is vice versa....Can’t you do something before the wholesale persecution begins.²¹⁸

Schrembs’ secretary answered with a terse, one-sentence reply: “The Most Reverend Bishop direct me to say, in answer to your letter of March 5, that the matter you refer to is entirely out of his jurisdiction and belongs entirely to the Bishop of Detroit.”²¹⁹ The letter is so abrupt, one wonders about the bishop’s thoughts at the time. Was he concerned that a Detroit priest was becoming such a problem for the bishop of Cleveland? Was he having difficulty crafting diplomatic replies to both supporters and detractors of Coughlin? Did the secretary word the reply more curtly than the bishop had intended? One also cannot help but wonder how Theresa Scherer reacted to the response.

A letter written to Monsignor Joseph F. Smith, diocesan vicar general and pastor of St. John Cathedral, found its way to Schrembs.²²⁰ The writer, Frank H. Rudd, frankly communicated his distaste for Coughlin:

After reading Coughlin’s address in the papers, I felt like writing Bishop Gallagher and telling him just what sane minded Catholics think of this disgusting situation, but after his endorsement of the padre and his theories, I thought it would be lost effort on my part to do so. I doubt if Catholic authorities have any idea what this uncalled for ranting is doing for this country – but perhaps they

wish it to so – most assuredly all anti-Catholics think so, I am told, and some of the latter are growing very rapidly. After reading a headline in the “Univ. Bulletin,” in regard to the President’s inaction relative to Mexico – the thought occurs to me – “How can they expect Roosevelt to help the Church, down there, when a would be Hitler up here (Coughlin) is knifing him in the back, all the while?” ...I wanted you to know, Father, how many of us really feel.²²¹

Monsignor Smith replied, saying that he had forwarded Rudd’s letter to Schrembs, and added, “The only trouble with your letter is that it isn’t strong enough to express my sentiments....It is pretty hard to shut up demagogues. In this case I wonder if it would not do more harm than good.”²²² It seems that Coughlin was as unpopular with some members of the Catholic clergy as he was with some of the laity.

Schrembs corresponded with Rudd in a letter sent by the bishop’s secretary:

Monsignor Smith has sent your letter to him regarding Father Coughlin to the Most Reverend Bishop. The Bishop has no comment to make on it. He feels that it is difficult to pass judgment on a plan so much in its infancy. He wishes to state however that Father Coughlin has a perfect right to express his views, according to the privilege of Free Speech granted to him by the Constitution of the United States, and accorded to him by the Church as long as he does not preach erroneous doctrine.²²³

However, Schrembs also continued to receive letters from supporters of the Radio Priest. V. A. Schantz, of A. J. Schantz, Sons & Company (“Builders of High Grade Organs”) of Orrville, Ohio, wrote to the bishop on August 6, 1936 (a few weeks after the Townsend Convention and one week before the national convention of the NUSJ):

It was most gratifying to see your statement in the Plain Dealer this morning approving Father Coughlin.[§] For years we have been fervent believers in the principle which he advocates as well as supporters of the cause. Your courageous example we trust will be followed immediately by every bishop in the United States; in fact, we believe that unless that very procedure is followed at once, interest in the cause may begin to wane.²²⁴

[§] “Schrembs is for Coughlin as Reformer,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 6, 1936 (see Part II of this thesis).

Mr. Schantz's gratification may have changed to displeasure by the end of September when Schrembs and Archbishop McNicholas of Cincinnati spoke out against Coughlin. Some Coughlin supporters sent angry letters to Schrembs. May A. Carroll of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, addressed a heated letter to the bishop:

Today two of our large newspapers were blaring with headlines about your attack on Father Coughlin for his recent speech in Ohio. I wonder if you realize what a terrible setback our holy religion has received as a result of your jealous and uncharitable criticisms of a fellow priest. I can assure you that these newspapers owned and controlled by Jews are gloating over the chance to sell their editions for the amusement and derision of the Protestants and Jews of our town. If you believe in the doctrines of Jesus Christ and the encyclicals of our holy Pope you could not characterize Mr. Roosevelt by any other name except anti-God....When Mr. Smith was running for the Presidency a few years ago all the non-Catholics organized to defeat him yet today our priests are attacking Father Coughlin for the amusement of these same people....You and the other "high prelates" had better stop twiddling your thumbs and join Father Coughlin in helping restore democracy in our country instead of crucifying him. Be thankful to God for such a leader and help put the principles of Christianity in practice.²²⁵

Another pro-Coughlin writer, E. L. Harper, of Chicago, wrote to Schrembs on the same day Carroll did:

I take this opportunity to voice my bitter disappointment, shame, and amazement, when a Dignitary of the Church joins with the mob and the atheistic press in attacking and condemning one of his fellow Priests of God – a press who travels the world over in order to find one single item to put it as their headlines to bring dishonor to the Church and Her priests....I fear, Your Excellency, you are one of those who are swayed by the politicians in your Diocese, or by parish priests who have politicians in their congregations who can give large sums to the different yearly collections, but these sums are as the "30 pieces of Silver Judas got."...Think of the scandal you have likewise caused us poor Catholics trying to work for a living by the sweat of our brow – when we can get it – beside every other existing anti-Catholic organization and religion perhaps and our ever existent battle of defending the Church and our priests....If, by chance, you do not agree with Fr. Coughlin's ideas (which you should if you had the right spirit) you would call to mind the old proverb "Silence is Golden" and when you are approached by press reporters concerning Fr. Coughlin you will make the answer "I have no comments to make."...I am writing this letter in the name of hundreds of my neighbors who likewise think as I do.²²⁶

Ammon Baus, another Philadelphian, sent an "open letter" to Schrembs:

I have before me a prayer which you recited at the Republican Convention. Not condemning this prayer, but in using your own words, I want to remind you that you asked God to give us men, a time like this demands. Does it ever occur to you that you should become one of those men? Instead of criticizing an humble priest, namely Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, who has obeyed the teachings of Christianity, and who is obeying the Encyclicals of Pope Pious XI & Pope Leo XIII. Remembering that Christ used the whip to drive the money changer from the Temple. We, the American people will use ballots, but if it becomes necessary, Bullets. If you prefer, Bishop Schrembs, to stand idly by, may God send us more Bishops like Michael J. Gallagher, who prefers not to wait until revolution is upon America such as is happening in Spain... [L]et me remind you that there are about 10,000,000 men and women who sanction and will carry out the words and actions of the great leader of America, Rev. Charles E. Coughlin.²²⁷

Schrembs responded to a letter written by Louis Beauregard of Cohoes, New York, on October 1, 1936. The letter from Beauregard to the bishop was not in the Schrembs file; judging from the bishop's reply, Beauregard was displeased by statements attributed to Schrembs in a newspaper article. Schrembs wrote:

I have your recent letter and I am very sorry that you have a wrong slant on my interview concerning Father Coughlin's statements. For years I have been an intimate friend of Father Coughlin and I would be the last man "to attack" Father Coughlin. I think he is doing a wonderful service to the country but the use of invectives and personalities does harm rather than good. My interview, as given by me, was really a defense of Father Coughlin with a kindly warning to avoid personalities....Possibly the headlines in the paper which you read misled you. If you will read my article, provided it is published correctly, you will find that I spoke as a friend of Father Coughlin.²²⁸

Youngstown, Ohio, attorney Benjamin J. Vennitti acknowledged that Schrembs had "rallied to the defense of Reverend Charles E. Coughlin" when the Radio Priest was criticized by "certain selfish interests, who, under the guise of their cloak of office, have seen fit to belittle the educational addresses delivered by Father Coughlin." Vennitti went on to name one of those "selfish interests":

A voice from the wilderness in the person of Msgr. John A. Ryan, by his utterances, which are merely his personal opinions, deductions and interpretations, as a Catholic, attempts to belittle the educational addresses delivered by Father Coughlin.... [I]n this coming political battle a few

representatives of Christ seem to be using their high office in the Catholic church to dictate to the faithful thereof their individual political beliefs, and therefore bringing the religion into disrepute. Would it be possible for you and Bishop Gallagher to call a meeting of the bishops of the United States and formulate such plans so as not to divide the thinking faithful? It seems to the writer that unless some concerted action is taken, that the time is not too far distant when the thinking Catholic will have to affiliate himself or herself with a movement dividing the Catholic church as a Republican-Catholic or Democrat-Catholic.²²⁹

A person of presumably a much different socioeconomic station than attorney

Vennitti addressed a pro-Coughlin letter to Auxiliary Bishop McFadden. Mrs. A.

Kilcoyne of Cleveland explained that her husband earned eighteen dollars a week and posed a question:

Dear Bishop, I want you to see things from Mothers point of view & answer me & say what you think of it....Could you honestly Support a Family of 8 on 18 Doll a week. Buy Clothes & Shoes & Food pay Rent light & Gass & Buy Coal. Buy Books for Children Send them to Catholic High School, pay Car fare for them, & try to have them look half way Decent? That is what we Mothers try to solve But it is too much for us....I wish some of the Priests who knock Father Coughlin would practice what they preach. I ask you what the New Deal have done for the Mothers & Children? ...I wish that the Bishops & priests who think that they should talk against Father Coughlin would keep their mouths Shut. If they cant do the Laboring Man & his Family any good let them please keep quite, for the working Man & his Wife & Family knows Father knows what he is talking about, if he didn't he would be behind the Boss.²³⁰

Bishop McFadden replied to Mrs. Kilcoyne:

No one is more deeply sympathetic with you and your problem than I am....I would advise you not to worry too much about Father Coughlin. Every good work of God prospers in the face of every opposition. Opposition only brings out the merit of the cause. Every great leader has had his difficulties, even unto death. God will bless every great work.²³¹

As Election Day approached, Coughlin supporters continued their letter writing.

Mrs. Elizabeth Krimp of Lakewood, Ohio, was also displeased with Msgr. John Ryan's criticism of Coughlin. She voiced her sentiments to Schrembs:

I am enclosing a copy of a letter which I wrote to Monsignor Ryan....I wish to ask a favor of you. We are meeting with opposition regarding the work of the N.

U. S. J. by those who have been instructed by their priests to stop giving to Father Coughlin broadcasts. They say the donations should be given to their own church. Don't they realize if the sixteen points become law, that we shall all be able to give more?...I have read in the papers that you are in favor of Father Coughlin, as is his own Bishop, so on the strength of that I make bold to ask a favor of you. Would you please tell these priests to be silent if they cannot endorse him, or be loyal to one of their own church? ... Father Coughlin needs the help and prayers of all of us.²³²

Krimp's letter to Msgr. Ryan referred to Coughlin as one whose "great heart beats with sympathy for the poor and they who are unjustly treated"; she warned Ryan:

The more you antagonize our leader, the greater the number of converts who are having their eyes opened. They look upon him as a man having an independent mind, and a real follower of the lowly Nazarene. One protestant told me that she thought him a second Christ. Do you think it kind of you to make a liar of Father Coughlin? The newspapers do enough of that. This persecution is causing people to turn to him.²³³

Schrembs sent a measured response to Krimp:

People as well as priests are much divided on the subject of Father Coughlin's present broadcast. His entrance into active party politics has estranged many of his former admirers, but that, after all, is a matter of personal concern. Those who love to hear Father Coughlin and wish to contribute their little mite towards the broadcast, have a perfect personal right to do so. Of course, they must not forget their obligation to their own parish church – that is a matter of conscientious obligations; the other is a matter of private good will.²³⁴

Perhaps Schrembs included himself when he referred to Coughlin's former admirers who had misgivings about the Radio Priest's involvement in active party politics. Schrembs was becoming much more critical of Coughlin in his replies to those who wrote to him about the Radio Priest. When Coughlin made good on his promise to leave the airwaves "forever" after the Union Party's humiliating defeat ("forever" turned out to be six weeks), J. S. Jacobec of Cleveland sent an anguished letter to Coughlin and mailed a copy to Schrembs. Jacobec wrote to Coughlin:

I wish to express to you, Father, my deep regret and compassion when I heard your decision over the air last Saturday. Regarding your temporary retirement, I

feel certain that the time will come when all those who should have cooperated and taught your principles will beg and clamor for your return....Regarding your discourse, if my suspicion is ever aroused to the extent of real evidence that your fellow clergy for either selfish or ruthless motives were instrumental in your unfortunate decision, I assure you, that already in some instances, I have referred to their silence as an indifference regarding Social Justice, and have personally called the assistant of Our Lady of Good Counsel Church “Yellow” because they did not possess the courage and fortitude to teach their parishioners social and economic justice as taught by the head of the Catholic Church. Further than that, I will not only continue to scrap with them, but advise them until they learn and preach the fundamentals of the Encyclicals, I will refrain from attending another Catholic Church. The fact is, I am so disgusted with their indifferent attitude, if they would not have a roman collar, I’d tell them in plain English to go to h---....Father, in this letter, I have opened my heart to you, because through your undeniable and indisputable principles and example you have in my opinion earned the title of a Father, but also merited the distinction to some day being referred to as a second Emancipator of our citizens.²³⁵

Schrembs sent a strongly worded reply to Jacobec only a day later, both

repudiating Jacobec’s criticism and speaking out against Coughlin’s political actions:

If the effect of Father Coughlin’s preaching and lecturing is to estrange you from your practical duties as a Catholic, then, indeed, there is something wrong about Father Coughlin’s preaching. The Catholic Church was established by Jesus Christ and it is the one means of saving your soul. It stands infinitely higher than any individual man or woman, priest or bishop....Now, understand, my good man, I am a personal friend of Father Coughlin and I have much sympathy with him, but when it comes to Father Coughlin’s political ideas, there is considerable difference of opinion among Catholics as well as Protestants. Father Coughlin is not infallible. Personally I feel that Father Coughlin’s mistake was in creating a political party, calling a political convention and nominating a candidate for President and Vice-President, both of whom did not have an appealing personality. The fact that less than ten percent of the men and women who pledged their allegiance to Father Coughlin voted for Lemke is clear proof that while they all loved Father Coughlin, they could not swallow Lemke....I am not blaming Father Coughlin for I am a personal friend of his. I dedicated his Little Flower Shrine and preached on that occasion and I have met with him frequently, but when you put Father Coughlin above the Church, you are making an awful mistake. Father Coughlin has set you an example of humility and resignation which you ought to follow and I am sure that if Father Coughlin actually reads your letter, he will be the first one to tell you that you are making a tremendous mistake.²³⁶

In 1937, Schrembs had a highly charged exchange of letters with Harm White of Cleveland. In addition to being exceedingly critical of Coughlin, White was pugnacious and argumentative with the bishop. He fired a salvo in his first letter to Schrembs :

When Father Coughlin first got into radio, I thought he was on his own. Many things he said agreed with good Christian principle. Then came the presidential election last Fall, and he jumped headlong into politics. Neither you nor the Vatican stopped him. It therefore became obvious that he was chosen as the church's cats paw to sink its claws into politics again....Time moves on. Bishop Gallagher and yourself are called to Rome. Father Coughlin is discussed at least. When the N.U.S.J. turns out to be a fiasco with less than a half million votes out of the claimed membership of ten million, then Coughlin promises to shut up. More conferences. Again the catholic political disturber breaks his word and comes back on the air. Now the racket is a new labor union....When any religion thinks more about power and money than it does about religionary principles as taught by the Great Jesus of Nazareth, it is time for catholics to demand leaders who have the spirit of God in their hearts and not the spirit of hatred. If my conclusions are not correct, please tell me why.²³⁷

When Schrembs did not reply, White sent another letter to the bishop:

If the opinions and citations expressed to you in my letter of a few weeks ago are not in line with the facts, kindly advise me as I am preparing a magazine article that must be free from prejudice. If you have no reply to make I must naturally assume that you have no answer. The absence of a reply would have to be construed as an admittance, therefore, to the correctness of the opinions and citations noted. Since bishops do not proclaim infallibility, I cannot presume to be error proof myself. If I do not get a reply, I therefore shall be fair enough to publish this letter as having been addressed to you. If you do make reply, I want to use it.²³⁸

This time the bishop responded to White's belligerent letter. Although Schrembs

typically addressed people by name, his letter to White began frostily with "Dear Sir":

I have both your letters of June 21st and of August 1st, 1937. I did not answer the first letter for the very simple reason that it really did not concern me. I have nothing to do with Father Coughlin. I am not his Superior and consequently I am not responsible for his words nor his actions. His radio talks expressed, as you say, sound Christian principles and, no doubt, millions listened to him. His entrance into the active political field was unfortunate. He was rebuked by his own Bishop Gallagher for using improper language in regard to the President of the United States. About that same time I gave an interview to the papers in which I reprovved Father Coughlin's unfortunate phrase about "bullets and

ballots.”... You say that time moves on and Bishop Gallagher and myself were called to Rome. That is absolutely false. I was in ill health at the time and Bishop Gallagher prevailed upon me to go away for the rest, which I did. Bishop Gallagher is dead and gone. It is rather cowardly to attack a dead man. As for myself, I am still quite alive and I can only tell you that your insinuations with regard to myself linking me with Father Coughlin are perfectly untrue and absurd.... You say in your letter that if I have no reply, you must naturally assume that I have no answer. Permit me to say to you that such a statement is absolutely illogical. My correspondence in matters dealing with my work is quite heavy and if I were to accept such an illogical principle as you state in your letter, I would just be wasting a lot of very valuable time.²³⁹

White, who did not seem to be chastened by the bishop’s reproach, replied with an even more contentious letter:

I realize you have no direct control over Father Coughlin but I also am advised that you took no action whatever to protest his attempt to form a third political party. Is this true or is it not? ...Now, Bishop Schrembs, I did not in any way attack Bishop Gallagher. You are wrongfully misinterpreting my letter. He obeys orders of his superiors just as you do. I merely stated that you and he were called to Rome. Authentic sources advise me that you were notified that you would be most welcome if you could come at that time. It strikes me that if you were seriously ill you should have been in the hospital and not on a sailing cruise. Perhaps you are not in touch with Mr. [Henry] Ford, I did not say that you were. But, one of the church’s prominent priests is working hand in glove with him to wreck the independent labor movement and the church is not making formal protest is it?²⁴⁰

Schrembs’ secretary replied on behalf of the bishop a few days later. The tone of the letter indicates how exasperated the bishop had become with White:

The Most Reverend Bishop directs me to say, in answer to your letter of August 14th, that your woeful lack of information makes any further correspondence with you useless.... In the first paragraph of your letter of August 14th you censure His Excellency for not attempting to break up the formation of a third political party. Any action by the Bishop at that time regarding the proposed political organization of Father Coughlin would probably have strengthened his hand. Whereas, by doing nothing, His Excellency allowed the abortive attempt to die a natural death.... Your third paragraph is evidence that you are easily misled by what are called “authentic sources.” The “authentic sources” advising you that he was called or invited to Rome are utterly at variance with the facts. I may say personally, and I accompanied Bishop Schrembs on his trip, that the trip had been planned nearly a year in advance.²⁴¹

The secretary ended the letter with a sharp rebuke: “If you wish to please His Excellency in at least one thing during your life, kindly discontinue this correspondence.”

Schrembs continued to receive more letters relating to Coughlin. Mae J.

Daugherty, of Euclid, Ohio, appealed to the bishop in autumn 1937 after Coughlin’s new superior, Detroit Archbishop Edward A. Mooney, had publicly reprimanded the Radio Priest:

I am writing to ask you to intercede in behalf of Fr. Coughlin with whatever Church Authority it would be most effective. We feel that Bishop Mooney, being young (a young Bishop) hardly realized the great wrong he was doing to Fr. Coughlin. It is our belief that if an old and wise and Holy Bishop, as Bishop Gallagher was, found no fault, it little behooves his successor to interfere.... We all know that if Fr. Coughlin must speak in Pious Platitudes about the injustices which abound, his work would be in vain. We are not living in a shackled country where free speech is forbidden yet, but just such things as this are bringing us nearer and nearer to dictatorship, and we are losing our old American Standards of freedom. People are not supporting this broadcast to hear praise where it does’nt belong; it has been to most of us our only real knowledge of financial and political affairs. Do, please, help to see that this valient priest, who at the risk of his health and life has defended the poor, be allowed to continue. It will be a great day for Pres. Roosevelt and his stooges when there is no one to publicize his duplicity. Were it not for Fr. Coughlin we would now be involved on the Loyalist side in Spain, just as Roosevelt is fast speeding us on now to an alliance with Great Britain, and his Chicago speech was the result of months of conniving with England. Still the only voice of protest and we shall rue the day. Strong language is needed, Dear Bishop, to impress the majority. Fr. Coughlin is the only one qualified to do this.²⁴²

Monsignor Floyd L. Begin, the bishop’s secretary, sent a detailed response that supported Archbishop Mooney:

The Most Reverend Bishop directs me to acknowledge your letter of October 19th and to say that he has no jurisdiction whatever in the Archdiocese of Detroit and is responsible, by virtue of his office, only for the Diocese of Cleveland. His Excellency’s interference in the misunderstanding between Archbishop Mooney and Father Coughlin would justly be resented. However, His Excellency directs me to say that if Father Coughlin or any priest wrote a book for general publication, he would have to have the approval of his own Bishop or of the Bishop in whose diocese the book is published, after which the book is considered safe and sound reading for any Catholic. Radio broadcasting parallels the

publishing of a book and falls under the same ecclesiastical policy. Father Coughlin, as a priest of the Detroit Archdiocese, must have the approval of Archbishop Mooney for everything he says. Since the Archbishop is responsible for what Father Coughlin says, it is only fair that he have some censorship over his broadcasts. The incident which led to the cancellation of Father Coughlin's series has probably not been sufficiently considered by you. Archbishop Mooney found fault with several statements made by Father Coughlin and declared them imprudent. Since the statements were made public, His Excellency's reprimand likewise had to be public....Father Coughlin's further action of cancelling his radio broadcasts was his own doing and was apparently a complete surprise to Archbishop Mooney, who had not forced him off the air and did not even know that he contemplated a cancellation of his broadcasts. Bishop Schrembs feels that Father Coughlin's cancellation of his radio broadcasts is entirely his own doing and Archbishop Mooney cannot be blamed. If the people of the country desire to hear Father Coughlin, they should write not to Archbishop Mooney, but to Father Coughlin.²⁴³

Begin ended with a supposition about Coughlin's real motive for leaving the airwaves (as it turned out once again, temporarily): "His Excellency suspects that the real reason for the cancellation of the radio program was not the misunderstanding between Archbishop Mooney and Father Coughlin, but rather a fear lest the financial support contributed by his radio listeners would not be sufficient to cover the tremendous expense."

By the late 1930s, as Coughlin became stridently anti-Semitic and openly favorable toward fascism, Schrembs was directly challenged regarding his dealings with the Radio Priest. Mrs. Joseph L. Jaffe of Cleveland wrote to Schrembs (who had been given the title of archbishop in March 1939) on September 22, 1939, the day the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported that Schrembs would preside at the September 28th peace rally at which Coughlin was scheduled to speak:

It has long been my desire to know if the Catholic Church stood with the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin. If the statements are correct in the Cleveland papers, that question has been answered if you appear on the same platform with him. The hope of the peace of the world is in a perilous position when the leaders of a mighty institution like the Catholic Church lend their support to a man who appeals to the lowest instincts in the unfortunate, disgruntled and ignorant. Where

is the brotherhood of man, the love of justice and truth! These are dark days for those who hope to preserve American democracy.²⁴⁴

On the same day, a prominent Clevelander, Edward Mose Baker, also wrote to the archbishop regarding Schrembs' presence at the upcoming peace rally. A stockbroker, civic leader, and philanthropist, Baker cofounded the Federation of Jewish Charities in 1903, serving as its first secretary, president for four years, and on the board of trustees for fifty years. Baker was chairman of the Republican Executive Committee for Cuyahoga County from 1907-1908; in 1912, he was a founder and first vice-president of the City Club of Cleveland, subsequently serving as president.²⁴⁵ Baker expressed deep concern about Schrembs appearing with Coughlin:

The announcement that you will preside at a Peace meeting next Thursday at which Father Coughlin will be the principal speaker, deeply distresses not only myself, but thousands of others who hold you in high respect and deep admiration for your beautiful spiritual qualities and your sterling Americanism....My dear Archbishop, would it not have been possible, effectively to aid the cause of peace, without giving aid and comfort to Father Coughlin? Father Coughlin, in the minds of millions of Americans, including many of your own faith, has been exercising a sinister influence on our American life. He not only has stirred up bitterness and hate against the group to which I belong, but has attempted to glorify Hitler and his methods against our own Democratic procedures. His magazine, Social Justice, has been a defender – sometimes outright and sometimes oblique – of the man who has despoiled Poland and plunged the civilized world into a welter of blood and tears. In your moving proclamation just issued, directing prayers for peace, you say, among other things concerning Poland, “Against her despoilers we must raise our voices in eloquent and unceasing protest.” Your presence at the meeting next Thursday will augment the importance and increase the prestige of Father Coughlin who has not only sown the seeds of hate and disruption in our American life, but has also been the friend, and to a degree, the advocate of Poland's chief destroyer. My hurt would be less had not my admiration for you been so great.²⁴⁶

“My dear Mr. Baker,” wrote Schrembs on September 27, 1939:

I have your letter of September 22nd expressing your surprise in regard to the Peace Meeting which has been arranged for next Thursday and at which Father Coughlin will deliver one of the addresses. This meeting was sponsored by the Social Justice Committee of the City of Cleveland and I was invited to preside

with the understanding that this was to be purely a peace meeting with a peace program. With that understanding, I accepted the invitation because, after all, there is nothing today more important than to make people peace conscious and peace minded. There are many prominent people in this country who have divergent views on war policies and the policies of our own Government. I have no quarrel with these people nor do I stand as their protagonist. My policy is – let us talk peace in order to make peace.²⁴⁷

The archbishop ended by assuring Baker of his “deep appreciation of your kindness and my good will towards your people whom I have always held in highest regards.”

The Jewish Community Council of Cleveland also contacted Schrembs regarding his planned participation in the peace rally. Max Simon, president of the Council, wrote that “the Jewish people of Cleveland have noted with chagrin and disappointment the newspaper and radio announcements that you are to preside over the meeting Thursday evening sponsored by the Social Justice Clubs and at which Father Coughlin will be the chief speaker.” While acknowledging the respect the Council had for the archbishop, Simon articulated its worries about his associating with Coughlin:

From our previous expressions you already know that the Jewish community of this city has always had the highest regard for your fairmindedness. They have always had the deepest respect for your spiritual integrity and basic good will....Our chagrin lies rather in the fact that your presence at the meeting will serve to enhance the prestige and strength of Father Coughlin. While you doubtless intend that your participation should only be regarded as an appeal for peace, the likely interpretation will be that you are in sympathy with the attitude and methods of Father Coughlin. The Jewish people, together with large numbers of Catholics and Protestants, feel very deeply that Father Coughlin has done more than any single individual in this country to stir up anti-Semitism in America, through his open and implied attacks on Jews, through his direct use of Nazi propaganda, and through his subtle support and defense of the Nazi regime. The Jewish people, sharing with all fairminded American citizens the earnest desire that democracy may be strengthened, in these times of all times, have viewed also with serious alarm his attacks on democracy.²⁴⁸

When the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* of September 28, 1939, reported that Schrembs would not attend the peace rally after all, another noted Cleveland civic leader applauded

the archbishop's decision. Alfred A. Benesch was an active community leader and senior partner in one of Cleveland's most prestigious law firms, Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff; he was active in B'Nai B'rith and a number of other Jewish civic and welfare organizations.²⁴⁹ Benesch wrote a note to Schrembs from his office at the Cleveland Board of Education, of which Benesch was a longtime member:

The best news I have heard this year appeared in this morning's Plain Dealer – that you will not preside at the Coughlin meeting. Praise be to God. From the depths of a grateful heart I thank you for your history-making decision. Cleveland retains her lofty reputation for liberalism & community.²⁵⁰

Schrembs replied to Benesch on September 30, 1939:

[Coughlin's] speech in Cleveland is now a thing of the past and I feel certain that it has done a world of good. There have been times when Father Coughlin expressed himself on political questions in a manner which grated on the ears of American citizens. I thank God that this was not the case in his speech in Cleveland. I did not preside at the meeting nor did I attend it but I insisted on seeing the manuscript of the speech before it was delivered. It was a masterly plea for peace.²⁵¹

However, even though Coughlin's speech at the rally was "a thing of the past," repercussions from the event continued to reverberate. George W. Furth of Cleveland wrote to Schrembs on November 17, 1939, to direct the archbishop's attention to an article in the November 20, 1939, edition of *Social Justice*, the publication of Coughlin's National Union for Social Justice. The article, datelined Cleveland and headlined "Archbishop Kept from Coughlin Peace Rally, Cleveland Jews Boast," made inflammatory accusations:

Efforts to "counteract the effect of the Father Coughlin peace rally," recently held in Cleveland, are being vigorously prosecuted by the local Jewish Committee Council. Credit for Archbishop Schrembs' withdrawal, on the very eve of the meeting which packed the Cleveland auditorium, is boastfully claimed by the Jewish Committee. Mr. George Furth, head of a committee of Jews who called on the archbishop, reported back that his committee had "informed Archbishop Schrembs that his participation in the meeting, as announced by the newspapers,

would give the effect of official Catholic sanction and would be interpreted as an indorsement [*sic*] of Father Coughlin's policies, and *had resulted in deep chagrin and disappointment among the Jewish people*" (italicized in original). The archbishop's withdrawal from the meeting two days later removed what the committee called "*the most harmful aspect of the problem*" (italicized in original)...The Jewish committee also reported that anti-Coughlin articles had been placed so far in the following magazines: the *Nation*, *American Mercury*, *Look*, *Catholic Voice* and *Equality*; and that a wide distribution of each had been made in Cleveland.²⁵²

Furth refuted the assertion that he had headed a committee that had called on Schrembs, declaring, "It has never been my privilege to meet you personally; much less to head, or be a member of, any committee which called on you for any purpose, or on behalf of any cause. I would be grateful to you for a line substantiating what I have said herein."²⁵³

In a letter dated November 24, 1939, Schrembs thanked Furth for calling his attention to the *Social Justice* article, assuring Furth, "As you well know, the statement is absolutely false." The archbishop enclosed a copy of a letter he had sent to Coughlin; he also added, "My relations with the Jewish people in the City of Cleveland, and for that matter of any city, have always been the most kindly and agreeable and I for one resent any aspersion cast upon your people."²⁵⁴

"My dear Father Coughlin," Schrembs' letter to the Radio Priest began,

My attention has been called to an article in your publication "Social Justice" stating that the reason for my absence from the Peace Rally in Cleveland, at which you were the principle [*sic*] speaker, was that a committee of Jews, headed by one George W. Furth, called on me to prevail upon me not to preside at that meeting. I want to tell you that this statement is a positive falsehood. My decision not to preside at the meeting was absolutely my own, uninfluenced by anyone. The admission cards with the names of the three speakers in bold relief are proof sufficient that my presence was not contemplated but was purely an after-thought.²⁵⁵

Schrembs enclosed Furth's letter and admonished Coughlin: "I am surprised that you would allow such a statement to appear in your paper without first taking pains to verify the report. I must ask you to rectify the misstatement contained in 'Social Justice,' which does an injustice to me as well as to the Cleveland Jews."²⁵⁶ (Furth replied to Schrembs, expressing gratitude for "not only calling Father Coughlin to account for distorting the truth, but also for the cordial tone of your letter."²⁵⁷)

Coughlin replied with an effusive, fawning letter to Schrembs, beginning with the salutation "May It Please Your Excellency" and continuing:

When your letter of November 24th came to my desk immediately I communicated with Mr. Schwartz who is responsible for the content of SOCIAL JUSTICE. Indeed I was surprised to learn of his carelessness and inaccuracy; for he is responsible for what his assistants do. May I explain to Your Excellency that I do not assume responsibility for that unforgivable article. As a result of its having appeared, Mr. Schwartz has been demoted by the officers of the corporation and his desk will be occupied by one of the most outstanding Catholic students of social justice in America. I am deeply grieved to know that the Bishop whom I love and admire more than any other ecclesiastic in the world outside of our mutual friend, Michael James Gallagher, whom I feel is still with us – I am deeply grieved to think that my trusted associates have been guilty of doing him a singular disfavor. I shall try my utmost to make amends not only by asking the new editor to print a retraction at the earliest publication date but also in other ways both material and spiritual.²⁵⁸

"Mr. Schwartz" was E. Perrin Schwartz, who had become editor of *Social Justice* in 1936 and who remained with the publication until its demise in 1942.²⁵⁹ Although Coughlin had relinquished the presidency of *Social Justice* to Schwartz in September 1939, Tull states that this did not appear to change anything but titles.²⁶⁰ Coughlin's assertions that he was not responsible for what appeared in *Social Justice* rang hollow; it was widely known that he had always dictated most of the publication's content.²⁶¹

Carpenter quotes Mrs. Jean Perrin Donohue, a *Social Justice* staff member, regarding Coughlin's control of the publication's content: "I know for sure... that not one line got

into that paper that Father didn't want there. ...[T]he final copy never included anything that Father hadn't given a final OK to."²⁶²

Schrembs was well aware that *Social Justice* was considered to be Coughlin's mouthpiece; his reply to Coughlin was cordial but firm, once again addressing him as "My dear Father Coughlin":

I have your kind letter of November 30th in which you disclaim any responsibility for the outrageous article in *Social Justice*. However, in the general opinion of the public, *Social Justice* is your publication. I am glad to have you assure me that in the earliest publication a proper retraction will be printed. I left my sick bed a little over three years ago and risked my life, as the doctors assured me, to accompany Bishop Gallagher to defend both himself and you before the Holy Father and the Roman Curia.^{263**}

Schrembs had evidently received a great deal of other Coughlin-related correspondence that was not retained in his file; his letter to Coughlin continued, "I almost regret now that I consigned to the wastebasket a large number of outrageously venomous letters which I received on the occasion of the Peace Rally Meeting in Cleveland. The venomous content of the letters was not only directed against me, but against the Pope, Archbishops and Bishops who were supposed to be out of sympathy with you and with your talks." Schrembs added strongly, "These people are, of course, fanatics. Such fanaticism may become very dangerous and should be forestalled and rebuked."²⁶⁴

** The December 11, 1939, issue of *Social Justice* published this statement about the November 20 article: "The Cleveland correspondent who mailed the news story to the editorial office of SOCIAL JUSTICE did not incorporate the statement that Mr. Furth had called on Archbishop Schrembs. This inaccuracy is attributed to the re-write journalist in the local editorial office. It was not discovered until His Excellency, Archbishop Schrembs, informed SOCIAL JUSTICE that at no time had he ever met Mr. Furth. As usual, we hasten to correct such an unfortunate mistake; for should it be permitted to go uncorrected, immeasurable harm would follow to all concerned. Archbishop Schrembs' reputation needs no defense because His Excellency enjoys a spotless esteem throughout America and even beyond its shores. SOCIAL JUSTICE merely repeats now what it said following the Cleveland meeting, namely, that the Archbishop did not attend. Any person who would interpret his non-attendance as a result of outside pressure would be attempting to cast aspersions upon a peerless leader who always has been fearless in the cause of truth and charity." The effusive language bears the unmistakable stamp of Coughlin. See http://research.udmercy.edu/digital_collections/coughlin_cou/social_justice_newspapers_socnew/socnew_1939_vol04a_24.pdf.

Schrembs' Coughlin file contained one additional letter, written by Mrs. Frank E. Uth of University Heights, Ohio, on February 23, 1940. Mrs. Uth described a *Social Justice* subscription drive:

The Contest is on "Forward America." Every new Subscription to Social Justice Magazine will help Father Coughlin in his great effort to keep America out of Foreign War. No Catholic can afford not to help if he is a real Catholic. So may I expect a cheque for one years subscription only \$3 to "Social Justice Magazine" the real Truth telling magazine. I'm working hard to help Father Coughlin to save America, my Great Grand Father fought in the Rev. War, the fighting blood is still in my veins when America and religion is in danger. In the second place I am trying to help myself as I am competing for a Cadillac, Chrysler or Lincoln Zephyr car, every new subscription to "Social Justice Magazine" I can obtain between now and Mar. 4th 40 I will get an extra bonus of 40,000 votes, renewed subscriptions also get a good vote value. As Mar. 4 is so near may I expect your cheque payable to Rev. Charles E. Coughlin? The sooner we can get cheque in the sooner the burden will be lifted for Father Coughlin who is a friend to all.²⁶⁵

One wonders if Schrembs reacted with ironic amusement (or, perhaps, consternation) to Uth's request. If the archbishop was astonished at being asked to aid Coughlin by subscribing to *Social Justice* (especially only a few months after the peace rally tempest), the graceful response by the archbishop's secretary does not indicate it: "The Most Reverend Archbishop directs me to send you the enclosed check for \$3.00 for a subscription of [*sic*] Social Justice Magazine. His Excellency wishes you every success in the contest."²⁶⁶

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Father Charles E. Coughlin was a major figure on the national stage throughout the turbulent decade of the 1930s, and the city of Cleveland had a front-row seat. The orator of Royal Oak engaged the Forest City – on the radio, in person, in the minds of Clevelanders. This begs the simple question: Why was Cleveland so significant for Coughlin?

Most obviously, Cleveland had much in common with Detroit, where Coughlin first rose to prominence. Brinkley describes how southeastern Michigan developed into a burgeoning region in the first part of the twentieth century:

The automobile industry and related enterprises were booming with the heady prosperity of the 1920s, and once-quiet rural communities were becoming bustling factory towns. With the economic expansion came population growth as the state attracted thousands of new working men and women – people of German, Irish, Italian, and eastern European stock, many of them Catholics.²⁶⁷

That description is apt for Cleveland as well. Like Detroit at that time, Cleveland was becoming an industrial powerhouse. Its steel mills and other manufacturing facilities offered employment to thousands of immigrants. Brinkley notes that Coughlin had strong appeal among older immigrant groups, particularly the Irish and Germans, who were well established in Cleveland.²⁶⁸ They and Cleveland's wealth of other eastern European ethnic groups, many of them Catholic, provided fertile ground for Coughlin.

Detroit and Cleveland also shared a physical proximity. It was easy for pilgrims to take the train to Royal Oak for Cleveland Day at the Shrine of the Little Flower. Coughlin himself traveled by boat from Detroit to Cleveland. More importantly, something else traveled easily between Detroit and Cleveland – the strong signal of radio station WJR, where the Radio Priest first took to the airwaves. Even before Coughlin's

broadcasts were carried in Cleveland, area listeners could tune in to his programs. As Coughlin's radio fame grew, Clevelanders were able to listen to the Golden Hour of the Little Flower on a local station, WGAR. As noted by Cohen, radio was particularly popular with working-class Americans.²⁶⁹ One can picture blue-collar Clevelanders, many of them Catholics, spending Sunday afternoons with Father Coughlin. As the letters of Frank Ponchak and Mrs. A. Kilcoyne illustrate, Coughlin found a sympathetic audience with working-class Clevelanders who were struggling to cope with the effects of the Depression.

Cleveland was politically significant for Coughlin too – it was just the type of urban, heavily Catholic district where he believed his influence to be strongest. The warm reception and ample press coverage he received for his May 1935 speech in Cleveland likely contributed to the choice of Cleveland as the site of the first annual convention of the National Union for Social Justice. Coughlin would have seen Cleveland as the perfect place to showcase both himself and the NUSJ to America.

The Radio Priest became a figure of great interest to Clevelanders even before his first appearance in the city. Newspaper articles about Coughlin fueled the interest Clevelanders already had developed listening to his broadcasts. When the famous voice arrived in the flesh in May 1935, Coughlin became the biggest story in town. Reporters must have loved covering him – he made great copy. What reporter wouldn't want to write about a speaker who enthralled thousands, outraced his security detail, and uttered such quotable, often outrageous, words? Even better, he was a Catholic priest!

However, the tenor of coverage changed as Coughlin became more controversial. Reporters who had initially viewed the Radio Priest as a novelty began to cast a more

jaundiced eye toward him as they noted his equivocations and increasingly intemperate remarks. They also poked fun at NUSJ delegates and their fanatical response to Coughlin.

On the editorial side, both the *Plain Dealer* and *Press* were wary of Coughlin as early as 1935. Coughlin was intolerant of divergent views, they noted. He urged his supporters to demand democratic processes from government, but he expected them to obey him. Coughlin's supporters were too willing to believe everything he said. As Coughlin became increasingly inflammatory, anti-Semitic, and admiring of fascism, the *Press*, *Plain Dealer*, and *Catholic Universe Bulletin* strongly criticized him.

The editors of Cleveland's newspapers were not the only community leaders who had to deal with Coughlin. Bishop Joseph Schrembs had been favorably disposed toward Coughlin when the Radio Priest first began to attract attention. Coughlin's emphasis on social justice and his use of the new technology of radio dovetailed with two of the bishop's own interests, and the men were on cordial terms. When Schrembs began receiving mail from both supporters and detractors of the Radio Priest, the bishop strove to take a moderate approach by emphasizing Coughlin's right to freedom of speech as an American citizen. Schrembs also pointed out that he was not Coughlin's superior and thus had no authority over him.

However, by late 1934, even Schrembs became troubled about Coughlin's activities, particularly the founding of the National Union for Social Justice. The bishop expressed misgivings about the NUSJ "not because of what it actually is, but because of what it may become....A body of organized men may easily be lead by a 'political boss' and become a political party."²⁷⁰ By 1936, when Coughlin ferociously attacked President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration, Schrembs wrote that "[Coughlin's]

entrance into active party politics has estranged many of his former admirers.”²⁷¹

Coughlin’s vituperative remarks about Roosevelt put Schrembs in an extremely difficult position. The bishop supported New Deal policies and must have been gratified that the Catholic Church had at last found a place at the American political table. Now, in addition to having to confront Coughlin’s attacks on the president and his policies, Schrembs also was forced to deal with a Catholic community that had become bitterly divided over Coughlin.

Along with the Coughlin-related discord that was brewing among Cleveland Catholics, Schrembs had to face problems related to Coughlin’s anti-Semitism. The bishop had always maintained good relations with Cleveland’s well-established and active Jewish community, so it was not surprising that they appealed to Schrembs regarding Coughlin. Schrembs deftly navigated the controversy that arose over the September 1939 peace rally, and the bishop was relieved when the situation seemed to resolve itself. When *Social Justice* alleged that “Cleveland Jews” had kept Schrembs from attending the rally, Schrembs confronted Coughlin civilly but firmly. When Coughlin tried to shift the blame to a subordinate, Schrembs firmly held him to account – the voice of *Social Justice* was construed to be the voice of Coughlin. By refusing to allow Coughlin to squirm off the hook, Schrembs called him to task.

Throughout the 1930s, Cleveland witnessed the best and worst of Coughlin. A gifted, dynamic speaker, he inspired a vast audience with his message of social justice. However, as his fame grew, his defects rose to the surface. The man who possessed many talents lacked a key virtue – humility. He relished being in the spotlight, and he sulked when he wasn’t the center of attention. He preached democracy but ran the NUSJ like a

dictator. For all his posturing, he failed as a political leader. His increasing extremism led him to appeal to people's fears rather than to their better natures. By the time the United States entered the Second World War, the *Cleveland Press* compared Coughlin to Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels and accused him of not wanting the United States to win the war.

Throughout his life, Coughlin displayed a maddeningly contradictory personality. With Cleveland having played such a significant role in the heyday of the Radio Priest, it is fitting that an incident in Cleveland in 1936 provides a perfect glimpse into the quintessential Coughlin. While the national convention of the NUSJ was meeting in Cleveland, President Roosevelt came to town to visit the Great Lakes Exposition, a lakefront industrial fair that celebrated the centennial of Cleveland's incorporation as a city.²⁷² The *Cleveland Press* reported Coughlin's response:

The Rev. Fr. Charles E. Coughlin was critical of the welcome the people of Cleveland gave President Roosevelt yesterday. "Judging from the pictures," he remarked, "Cleveland's welcome was disgraceful. I doubt if 1000 people were at the station." He was informed by one of the newspapermen present of the tremendous crowds that had greeted the President along the route. "That's fine. I'm glad of it," he said. "We must honor the office of President no matter what we may think of the man who occupies it. The moment we stop honoring the office will be a sad one in our history. If I had known just when Mr. Roosevelt was to pass our convention hall, I would have advocated recessing and going out to see him." He was reminded that the President's schedule had been printed in newspapers. "But he didn't keep to it," answered the priest.²⁷³

The newspaperman who had this exchange with Coughlin seemed to be well aware of Coughlin's penchant for self-contradiction. One imagines the reporter rolling his eyes and muttering, "Does this guy *ever* admit that he doesn't have an answer for *everything*?"

Coughlin's career may have taken him far from the Hamilton bungalow adjoining St. Mary's Cathedral, but he remained his mother's child throughout. He frequently

behaved like an overindulged child, expecting to be the center of attention and becoming resentful when he was not. His interactions with others were too often marked by inconsistency, intemperate accusations, or sycophantic flattery.

Even more damning, this Catholic priest frequently exhibited a decided lack of Christian charity. Coughlin may have invoked the “gentle Master,” but it is doubtful that Jesus Christ would have exhorted an audience to “bury” a United States senator, as did Coughlin when he attacked Ohio Senator Robert J. Bulkley in Cleveland on May 8, 1935. In many of his Cleveland speeches, Coughlin seemed to delight in making outrageous statements that were calculated to evoke a rabid crowd response. Most significantly, Coughlin refused to take responsibility for the *Social Justice* statement that “Cleveland Jews” had kept Bishop Schrembs from attending the peace rally on September 28, 1939, instead trying to pin the blame on a subordinate. Schrembs showed himself to be a man of character and strength, but Coughlin emerged as a coward.

For a man who was so central to the public eye and ear of the 1930s, Coughlin today has been relegated to the status of historical footnote. When he is mentioned, he is usually recalled as a ranting, xenophobic demagogue, a figure who became so dangerously extreme that his own church silenced him. Ironically, the man who had boasted of his fight against the bigots of the Ku Klux Klan is himself remembered as a bigot. Although many people during the 1930s (perhaps even Franklin D. Roosevelt) might have begged to differ, Charles E. Coughlin was his own worst enemy.

FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Father Charles E. Coughlin speaks on behalf of congressional candidates endorsed by the National Union for Social Justice at a rally in Cleveland Municipal Stadium on May 10, 1936. (*An Acme photograph; from the Cleveland Press Collection, Special Collections, Cleveland State University*)

Figure 2. Father Charles E. Coughlin speaks at the first annual conference of the National Union for Social Justice at Cleveland Municipal Stadium on August 16, 1936. (*From the Cleveland Press Collection, Special Collections, Cleveland State University*)

Figure 3. Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith, Father Charles E. Coughlin, and Dr. Francis E. Townsend are cheered by supporters at the first annual conference of the National Union for Social Justice in Cleveland on August 15, 1936. (*An Acme photograph; from the Cleveland Press Collection, Special Collections, Cleveland State University*)

Figure 4. Father Charles E. Coughlin strikes a combative pose at the microphone. (*From the Cleveland Press Collection, Special Collections, Cleveland State University*)

Figure 5. Overcome by illness while speaking at the first annual conference of the National Union for Social Justice at Cleveland Municipal Stadium on August 16, 1936, Father Charles E. Coughlin (second from left) is assisted from the stadium. (*An Acme photograph; from the Cleveland Press Collection, Special Collections, Cleveland State University*)

Figure 6. Archbishop Joseph Schrembs, fifth Bishop of Cleveland, 1921-1945. (From Hynes, Michael J. *History of the Diocese of Cleveland: Origin and Growth (1847-1952)*. Cleveland: Diocese of Cleveland, 1953, 302.)



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Archbishop Joseph Schrembs, fifth Bishop of Cleveland, 1921 to 1945.

Figure 6

NOTES

1. David H. Bennett, *Demagogues in the Depression: American Radicals and the Union Party, 1932-1936* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1969], 12.
2. Alan H. Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982], 119.
3. Bennett, 54.
4. Ronald H. Carpenter, *Father Charles E. Coughlin: Surrogate Spokesman for Disaffected*. Great American Orators 28 [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998], xiii.
5. Bennett, 222.
6. Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, the Father of Hate Radio* [New York: The Free Press, 1996], 8-9.
7. Warren, 9.
8. Brinkley, 85.
9. Ibid., 86.
10. Ruth Mugglebee, *Father Coughlin of the Shrine of the Little Flower* [Boston: L. C. Page, 1933], 76-77.
11. Brinkley, 87.
12. Ibid., 88.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Warren, 11
16. Charles J. Tull, *Father Coughlin and the New Deal* [Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1965], 2.
17. Brinkley, 88.
18. Ibid., 89.
19. Ibid.
20. Mugglebee, 154.

21. David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], 228.

22. *The Radio Priest*. VHS. Produced by Drasnin Productions, Inc., for The American Experience [Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation, 1988].

23. Mugglebee, 158-159.

24. Brinkley, 90.

25. Warren, 18-19.

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